The Castle Of Grumpy Grouch

A Fairy Story

MARY DICKERSON DONAHEY, CAIRNS COLLECTION OF AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS

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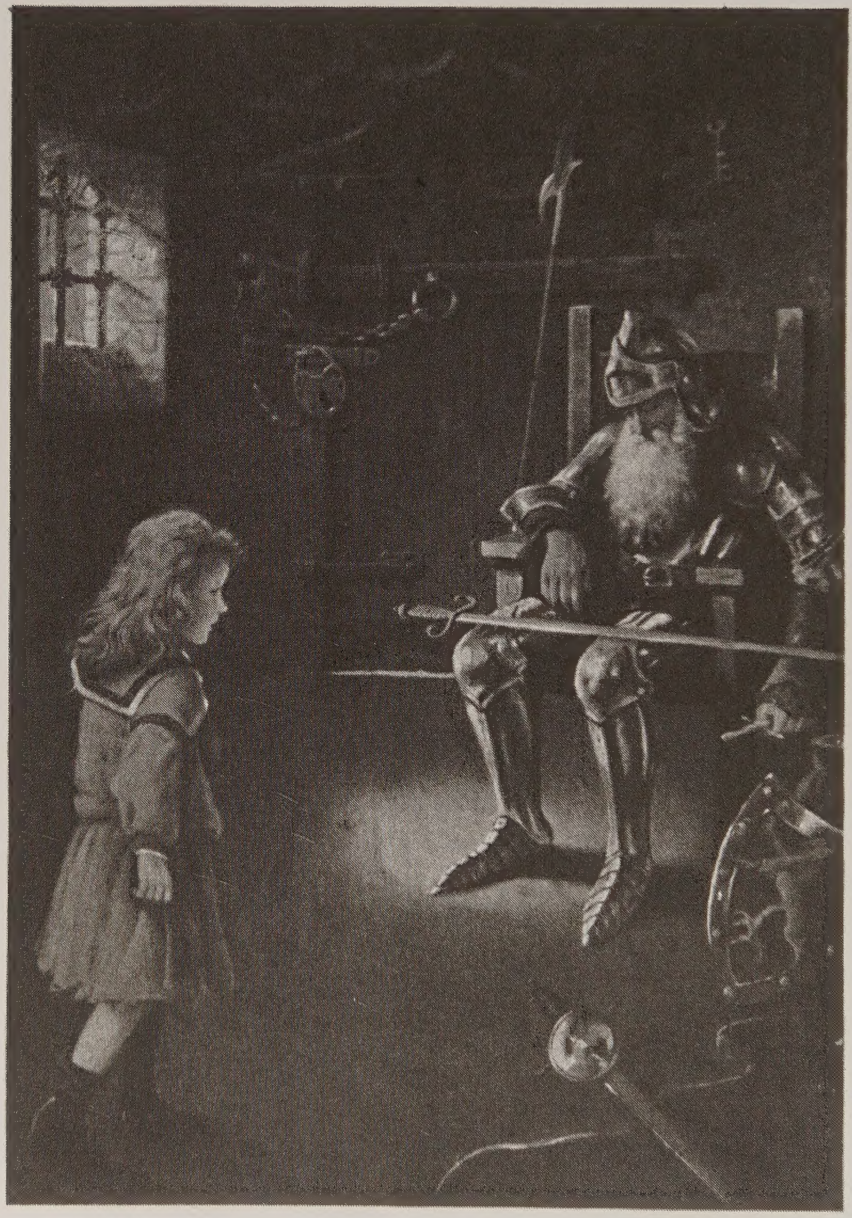
THE CASTLE OF GRUMPY GROUCH



"Before it (the door) was sitting a man. He wore armor and a great sword lay across his knees."

THE CASTLE OF GRUMPY GROUCH

A FAIRY STORY

BY
MARY DICKERSON DONAHEY

COLOR ILLUSTRATIONS BY
J. R. CLAY

PEN DRAWINGS BY
RUTH ELLIOTT NEWTON

PHILADELPHIA:
EDWARD STERN & CO., INC.
1908

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Published, October, 1908

Yale Book
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To

TWO LITTLE HALLS
AND SIX LITTLE
DONAHEYS WITH
THE LOVE OF

"Aunt Mary"

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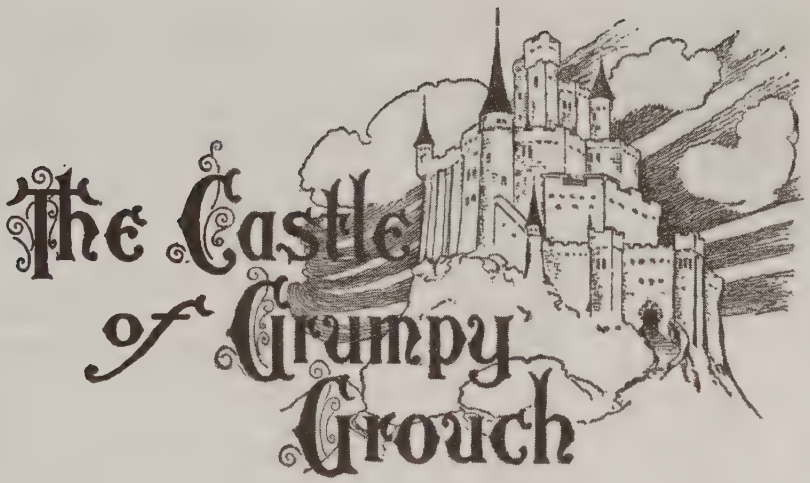


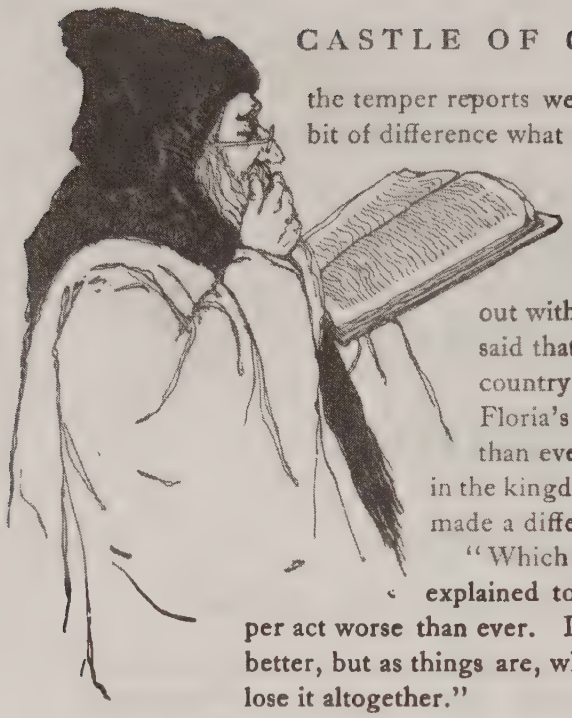
CHAPTER I

THE PRINCESS LOSES HER TEMPER

SHE had been born a princess. Most little girls would have liked that ever so much. But this one did not. For they had forgotten to put any princes into her family, and so she had to be taught many tiresome things—how to hold a scepter properly, and how to make speeches in public, and the angle at which a crown was most likely to stick upon her head, and how it was best to govern cities.

There were other lessons, too, such as most boys and girls must learn, but the hardest one of all was how to keep her temper. Of course she would have had to learn that, no matter who she might have been. But, being a princess and having such a very great deal of temper, she had to study at it harder than most children do.

There was an old, old professor, very wise and kind and patient, who came to the castle every morning and gave her lessons and if



the temper reports were not good, it did not make a bit of difference what all the other teachers might say. Even if their reports were very good indeed, her father frowned and her mother looked sad, and all the newspapers came out with great red letter "extras" and said that the outlook for the peace of the country was very bad, as the Princess Floria's temper reports had been worse than ever that day. And all the people in the kingdom sighed so deeply that it really made a difference in the atmosphere.

"Which is quite enough," the Princess explained to everybody, "to make my temper act worse than ever. If you'd let it alone it might get better, but as things are, why you'd better look out or I'll lose it altogether."

Then the whole country sighed again, and the Princess stamped her foot.

"Everybody is horrid," she cried, "and you're all so fussy too. You expect altogether too much. I'm very pretty, and I know a great deal, and I am kind-hearted and can be very nice if I like. I should think that ought to be enough to suit any country under the sun."

But somehow it wasn't. And when she talked so, they told her she mustn't be conceited, either, and spoke of another professor, to teach her modesty, which made one more lesson to learn, so that the Princess Floria stamped her foot so hard she cracked the stones in the courtyard of her father's palace.

"Now, then," she cried, "that settles it. I will lose my temper altogether. You make such a horrid fuss, I'll just show you. If a temper is such a naughty thing, why should I keep it, I'd like to know? I should think I'd be much nicer without it. I shan't take another lesson from that old temper man, so there," and she stamped her foot again, and started to run. She ran and she ran till she was out of sight of the city, and the palace towers and even the blue sky. For she was deep in the heart of the forest that stretched all around her father's country.

It was such a great forest that nobody had ever tried to see what lay beyond it, or within it, for that matter. There was nothing that the people really needed that was not right there in their own country, and if the forest was dark and deep, why should they try to go through it? They were quite contented where they were. And so they lived happily in their city or on their farms, and admired the great trees that stood all about them, and went in under them for walks, or picnics, but never with the least idea of journeying through to the other side.

But it was not because they were afraid of the forest. Nothing had ever come out of it that had harmed them in any way, and no one could remember anybody's ever being lost there. So they only smiled and sighed again when the naughty little princess ran in under the trees.

"She'll find her temper there, and come out as sweet as a honey comb," they said, and then went on with their work.

All but the old temper professor, whose lessons should have been learned before this.

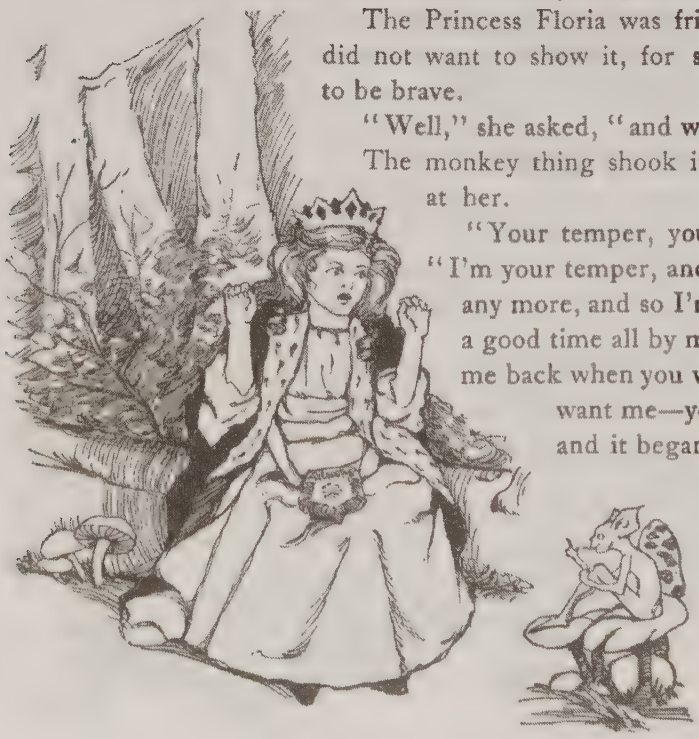
He was very sad. For he knew what dreadful things might happen to her if she went on talking in that way.

And happen something did! For after the Princess had run till she was out of breath, she threw herself down upon the moss and cried, "I've lost my temper for good. I'm glad. I never want to be bothered with it any more. I don't want to keep my temper. I want to lose it for ever and ever."

Piff! Crack! Pouf!

There was a funny little noise inside her body, and then a little struggle, as of something trying to get free, and the next she knew a creature had popped out of her mouth, and was sitting there on the ground blinking up at her!

Such a homely, horrid, funny little thing, that looked like a monkey and jabbered at her all the time and nodded and winked and jeered and stuck out its saucy tongue and made faces.



The Princess Floria was frightened, though she did not want to show it, for she had been taught to be brave.

"Well," she asked, "and what are you?"

The monkey thing shook its skinny little finger at her.

"Your temper, your temper," it cried, "I'm your temper, and you don't want me any more, and so I'm going away to have a good time all by myself. You can't get me back when you want me—for you will want me—you'll see, you'll see," and it began making faces at her all over again.

"Well," said the Princess Floria, "its a pity if I can't get

along much better without such an ugly, jeering thing as you, than with you. Hurry, get out of my sight! If I'd known how horrid you were, I'd have lost you long ago, instead of trying so hard to keep you. How silly I was!"

"Aha," cried the temper, "that's just where you're wrong. When you keep me, I'm nice and sweet and good and handsome, and you are all that too. But when you lose me, and abuse me, why then I'm horrid just as you see me now. And you'll be horrid till you get me back. You'll find out soon enough. You'll soon wish for me back again. But I shan't come. You've abused me, and I'm going off to have a rest. I'll be happier than you. Good-by." Quick as a flash the little monkey thing swung itself up into the trees and was gone.

The Princess Floria sat staring after it a minute, and then she laughed. But it was not the gay, bright laugh her people loved to hear. It was the naughty laugh, that made everybody look grave and sad when they heard it.

"Humph," she cried, "did you ever in all your life? Talk about conceit! It must have been that temper of mine that made them say I was conceited. I'll be nicer than ever now I've lost it, and there'll be two lessons I won't have to learn any more either. That's fine! I'll just hurry home and tell them. Mercy me, though, what a path! They know I use it. It should be better kept. I'll tell that gardener a thing or two when I get back," and she tossed her head and started home.

They were very glad to see her at the palace. She had been gone so long they were getting a little anxious, and then besides she was always so bright and pleasant right after one of her fits of temper, that they didn't want to miss a minute of her goodness. Some people had been heard to say that at these times she almost

made up for the other times when her temper was lost. But whenever anybody said that to the old temper professor, he sighed deeply, and taught her all the harder, for he knew it was a bad way to look at things. He was very much worried now, fearing something had happened, and came down the palace steps to meet her.

But the Princess only scowled at him, and hurried past.

"Where's that gardener?" she screamed at the top of her voice. "Send him here directly," and then when he did not come, she began to stamp and scold, and pretty soon to cry.

The King and the Queen came out and looked at her sadly, and shook their heads and ordered her to bed without any supper. But she only cried the more, and they were not sorry tears either. Just naughty, bad ones as anybody could tell by looking at her twisted face, which, could she have but seen it, might have frightened her. Because it looked just like the ugly twisted one of the little monkey-like thing that had popped out of her when she was in the forest.

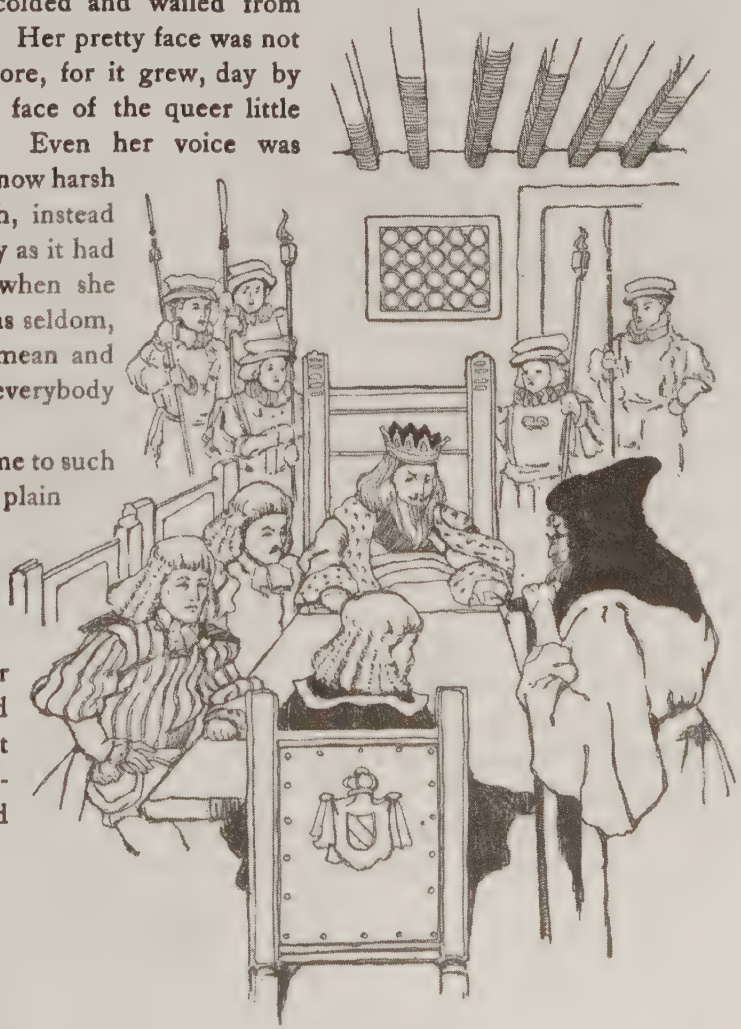
But she went up stairs, as she was told, and cried herself to sleep. And everybody said, "Well, the worst is over for this time. She will be better in the morning."

But they were mistaken. That was only the beginning. She was worse—much worse!

She hadn't any temper to keep, you see, so how could she be pleasant? She flew into a rage at all sorts of things, and talked

and scolded and screamed till everyone around her was crying, and she didn't seem to care.

It went on for days and days, getting worse every minute, and it was changing the whole kingdom. Although she had been often naughty before, she had generally been sweet and kind and gay, and the people had loved her very much and been proud of her. But now! She scolded and wailed from morning till night. Her pretty face was not even pretty any more, for it grew, day by day, more like the face of the queer little monkey creature. Even her voice was changing, and was now harsh and shrill and high, instead of sweet and merry as it had always been, and when she did laugh, which was seldom, her laugh was the mean and horrid one, which everybody disliked to hear.



At last things came to such a pass that it was plain something must be done. The King called all his counsellors and they sat together many hours and talked, and at last they called the temper professor and

asked him what could be done to help the little Princess get her temper back. Because you see, by this time they all knew what had happened.

"There is only one thing possible," said the wise old man, "Your Majesty, she must go and find it."

"But," asked the King, "can't I send somebody else—a soldier maybe, or a clever young detective, or my whole army if need be, or you—you know so much about tempers, professor, why can't you go and get it?"

But the old man shook his head. "It would be of no use," he said, "the Princess will have to go herself."

"Very well," said the King, sadly. For unhappy as she had made him lately, he did not know what he would do without his little daughter, "very well, send her chief governess to me, and her maid and the biggest policeman in all the country. I will give them orders for the journey."

But the old professor shook his head again. "Your Majesty," he said solemnly, "she must go alone."

There was such an uproar at this time, the little princess ran to see what it was all about.

And when she heard, she grew angrier than ever and made the awful monkey face and cried, "If you don't want me any more, why of course I'll go away—and of course I'll go alone. I'd rather. Do you suppose I want any of you tagging along? I won't look for my temper, for I don't want it ever any more, but I'll go away, and then maybe you'll be sorry, when I'm gone. You won't see me any more for a long time, I tell you. Good-by," and before anybody could have said "boo" to a mouse, the naughty little princess had caught her crown, whisked out through the open door, past the sentries and the maids and all the people

who stood waiting to hear what had been decided upon in the council, and was down the steps, through the courtyard and out into the forest again, running she did not know where or why.

And behind her, the people after hearing what the temper professor had to say, went quickly back to their work, very sorry for the little Princess, who had had to go all alone by herself out in the world.

Her father ordered the whole court in mourning and said there should be no gaiety or pleasure until his little daughter should come home again.

So, as there will be no fun in that kingdom for some time to come, it will be best

to follow the adventures of the little princess in her search for the missing temper.

Because the truth was, that she really meant to find it after all, no matter what she said.

CHAPTER II

IN THE HOUSE OF THE WITCH

REALLY and truly, the little princess was very sad. She knew just what a disagreeable girl she had been, but she could not help it. She could not help it at all!

She was like the girl in the fairy story, from whose mouth came toads and snakes whenever she tried to talk. No doubt that girl was very much astonished when the horrid things came popping out, but she couldn't have been more so than was the little Princess Floria at the unpleasant words that fell from her lips.

At first she had not realized what was wrong with her, and then all of a sudden she understood—she had lost her temper entirely, and so it was impossible for her to say one kindly thing!

She knew it first when she went to say "Thank you," and brought out "You horrid thing—take it away," instead.

There, in the council-room, she had meant to say, "I know that I've lost my temper, and I'm very sorry, and I'll gladly go and look for it, even if I do have to go alone, because I want to have you all love me again, as you used to do."

But she hadn't said that at all—very far from it—and she felt sad and lonely and most unhappy.

After she had gone a long way into the forest, she threw herself down on a pile of moss to think, for she knew she must make some plans, and decide where she should go in search of her temper.

It was very dark and still in the woods and, as she lay looking upwards, she saw a streak of sunshine trying its best to get through a clump of thick bushes. Quick as a wink, she had jumped up, and was parting the leaves to let the sunlight in. And then, all of a sudden, it seemed to change, and instead of being a mere spot of light, the Princess thought it looked like a dainty, gauzy fairy, with golden wings and a face so bright the light from it made her blink a little.

When she looked right at the place, why there was only a stream of sunshine, pouring through the bushes down upon the moss. But when she turned her face a little, she was sure that out of the tail of her eye she could see the pretty figure, with the shining wings and wonderful face and hair of lovely gold.

It was most provoking that she could not be quite sure! Maybe she could feel!

And, looking side-wise, she put her hand towards it, when — wonder of wonders—her fingers were met by a soft warm kiss!

"Thank you," said a little voice as clear and sweet as music, "I did so want to get through those leaves to this bit of moss. It hasn't had any sunshine for some days, and it does need some once in awhile. Now, in return, is there anything that I can do for you?"

The Princess Floria flushed with pleasure. A fairy. Here was a chance for help indeed! She started to say, "Oh! yes, please do help me. I've lost my temper and even wished it away forever. But I'm so sorry now, and I want to get it back again, so people will love me as they always have. Won't you show me how?"

But instead she heard herself crying, "No—no—no! Go away and don't bother. I'm sorry I did anything for you, so there!"

It was dreadful! The poor little Princess Floria hid her face in her hands and cried. She could never be polite to people any more, or say the smallest pleasant word, until she found that temper, and how could she expect anyone to help a child who said such unkind things? At this rate, she couldn't even ask questions as to where her temper was, or how she might find it.

She had quite given up hoping for help from the fairy who had just spoken. For who was going to stay, least of all a fairy, and be abused in that manner?

But again she felt that soft warm kiss, on her little wet cheek this time, and the clear voice said, tenderly, "Poor dear, I know all about it now. You're a little girl who has lost her temper. And you can't talk right any more, can you? Well, well, do you want me to help you?"

The Princess Floria jumped up joyfully and opened her mouth to speak. Then she remembered. She would only say naughty, ungrateful things, no matter how hard she tried, so what was the use? She had better say just nothing at all. So she simply nodded hard, and held out her hands, pleadingly.

"That's right," said the voice, approvingly; "that's a very good idea. Don't try to talk. Under the circumstances, it's much better. Now, then, listen and I'll tell you what has become of your temper. Far, far away, on the top of a tall mountain in the middle of a big, black cloud there is a castle. And in that castle there is an ogre, and the only thing he does, all day and all night too, is to try to get children's tempers away from them.

"He likes to get tempers into his castle and shut them up in a room there, and tease them, and then he likes to watch the children to whom they belong, and see all the troubles they have, for he is very, very wicked. His name is old Giant Grumpy Grouch, and his castle is called the Castle of Sulks. He's got your temper, and, by this time, it would be very glad indeed to come to you, if it could, for he's not nice to the tempers at all.

"Generally they can go back to their owners, after they're tired of the wicked old giant, and find out that the good times he promised them if they went to the Castle of Sulks never come true. But you see, you wished your temper away altogether, and so Giant Grumpy Grouch will keep it shut up very tight and watch it all the time, so it cannot get away, and you will never see it again unless you go to him, get into the castle, and make him give the temper back, all of which will be very hard."

The Princess Floria wanted to say, "I don't care how hard it is. I'll do anything possible if I can only get my temper back and be good and pleasant again. I want to be loved. Please help me." But alas, alas! Instead, she cried out naughtily, "Well, he can just keep the horrid old thing as long as he likes. Think I'd bother to get it back? And I don't want you fussing around either. Go away and let me alone! I don't care." It was too dreadful! The little Princess threw herself down upon the moss

again and sobbed. She was sure the fairy would go away and leave her after that, and what chance would she ever have alone, with such a naughty tongue in her head, of finding old Giant Grumpy Grouch, in his high, dark castle, and getting her temper back again?

But the warm kiss came a third time and lay soothingly on her cheek as the voice said, softly, "Poor, poor little Princess! I can help you. But one thing you must promise. You must not say one single word, from this minute, until you get your temper back. If you do, you'll set everybody against you, and all the work we may have done between us will go for nothing, and you may be worse off, even, than you are now. Will you promise?"

Promise? Of course she would. The Princess nodded so hard her hair stood straight out and flapped funnily in the breeze, and she clapped her hands and screwed her pretty little mouth so tight it looked like nothing but a wee pink button-hole.

The fairy laughed. "Very well," she said, "remember! Not one word to anybody, or anything, from now on. And I'll do my best to help you. But now you must come out of the wood, or I can't talk to you any more. You see I'm a Sun Fairy, and I can't stay in one place very long—I have so much to see to, I must be moving all the time. Come, follow where I lead."

The Princess Floria felt tiny warm fingers on her own, and tired as she was, she followed easily through the woods, till at last the Sun Fairy brought her to a little open place in the forest, where there were so many sunbeams lying thick and warm, that she quite lost hers, though she could still hear the sweet voice, close against her ear.

"Listen," it said, "and remember all I say. During the daytime I will guard you all I can, and guide you. You must follow as I lead, because I know the way. But during the night I cannot

be with you. This day is nearly over, and I must go soon. To-night you will have to stay in the little house in this clearing, for it is the only one for many miles. A witch lives there. You will not think her at all kind, but she will not really hurt you, if you obey her. It will be hard, but you must do many hard things now, you know. Be quiet and good, do not say a word, whatever happens, and in the morning, early, I will wake you and take you away, and you can begin your long journey to the big, black mountain, where Giant Grumpy Grouch has built his Castle of Sulks. Remember what I have told you—obey, be silent, and look for me early in the morning. I must hurry—good night, good night."

In another moment all the sunbeams had run away together. Between the tall straight tree trunks of the forest, Floria could see the broad red face of the setting sun.

He seemed to laugh and nod at her as though he were saying "Cheer up, cheer up." She nodded back, watched till he dipped quite out of sight, and then, setting her lips tight, she started towards the low little house at the other side of the clearing.

She had never been away from home at night before, and she was lonely, and homesick, and a little frightened, and did not at all like the idea of spending the night with a witch.

However, there was nothing else for it. She walked up to the low door and knocked. Nobody came. She knocked again and again and again. Now it was growing very dark. A great bat came sweeping by and brushed her shoulder with its wings. A pinch-bug flew against her cheek, a katy-did began calling from the nearest tree, and the Princess Floria, now frightened indeed, knocked so very loud that the door flew open at last, so suddenly that she almost fell down inside. An old woman was standing before her. A queer little, bent little woman, with a great pointed hat, as tall as herself, and shoes so long that the toes nearly came up to her chin. She had the sharpest of eyes, the smallest of faces, and little claw-like hands.

"Oh, ho!" she cried out, in a thin cracked voice, "and what have we here?"

The Princess Floria opened her mouth to tell her, and then remembering, shut it with such a snap that it hurt.

But she pointed to the little crown upon her head, and the bands of ermine on her long flowing sleeves, and the royal arms of her country worked in gold on the front of her white dress. She thought they ought to tell just who she was.

The old woman's eyes grew brighter and keener as she reached out one skinny hand and drew the Princess in, and shut the door.

"Aha," she cried, "I suppose you think I'll take you for a Princess?"

The Princess Floria nodded, and the old witch laughed. "That's a joke," she cried. "A princess! and out here all alone at night! A likely story that is. You've stolen the clothes."

Poor Princess Floria! She never wanted to speak so much in all her life. But she never said a word. "My temper," she kept thinking to herself, "my temper. I must hold my tongue so I can get my temper back." And she hung her head and was silent.

"Lost her tongue, too," cried the old woman. "A cat's got it. Cat's got her tongue. Not my cat. Hey, Thomas?" and she stroked a big black cat that came out from the chimney corner.

"Not at all," said the cat; "I wouldn't bother with such a thing," and the Princess was so astonished she nearly spoke.

"She saw them take her rich dress and her crown and turn them over and look at them."

"What shall we do with her, Thomas?" asked the old woman.

"Make her work first," said the cat; "I'm hungry. Then send her to bed."

"Right, right as usual," cried the witch. "Come then, get out of those clothes. Don't shake your head. Who ever heard of cooking in such things? Besides, they're stolen. Take them off quick, or I'll send you to jail!"

Very much frightened, Floria slipped off her pretty dress and put on the ragged one which the old witch brought her, put her pretty little feet into the stiff old shoes, and stood waiting to see what she was to do next. The witch set her to cooking.

Of course, being a Princess, Floria had never had to cook, and she did not know what to do at all, and blundered dreadfully; but the old witch and the cat sat by and directed her while she did all the work, upsetting things and spilling soup and water and coffee, and getting scolded every minute. But at last the supper was done, and she was given some on a plate and told to go and sit by the door to eat it, as the cat and the old woman wanted the warm places by the fire.

Then she saw them take her rich dress and her crown and turn them over and look at them, but when they saw she noticed, they sent her upstairs to bed.

It was a low little room, with a window through which she could see the stars. There was a mattress in the corner with a pile of bedding tumbled upon it. But the Princess, though she was not used to such work, made herself a very comfortable bed, and was so tired she soon fell sound asleep, without once stopping to cry over her misfortunes.

Even in her dreams she seemed to be hunting for her lost temper. She was just dreaming that she had found it and was safe at

home again, when somebody kissed her softly, and she jumped up, thinking that the dream had certainly come true.

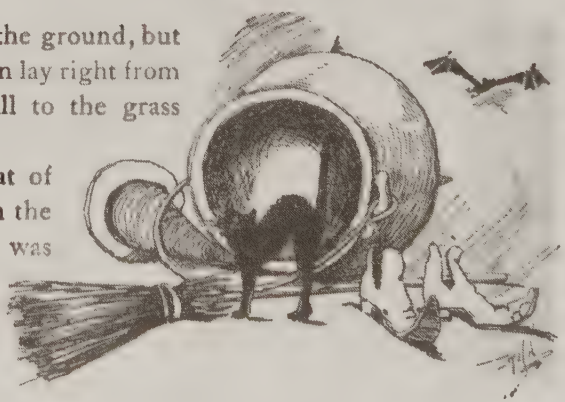
But no, there was the bare little garret, just as she had seen it when she fell asleep, except that now there were no stars shining through the window, but daylight, and the Sun Fairy was dancing round her bed, stooping now and then to kiss her, and whisper in her ear, "Hurry, little Princess—hurry! You must go before the old witch wakes."

Floria jumped up and rubbed her eyes. Then she pointed to her ragged dress and clumsy shoes.

"You must wear those," said the Sun Fairy. "The witch will not give up your others, and anyway, you could not travel in those clothes. Think how everyone would stare. People are not used to seeing children with golden crowns and ermine-trimmed dresses on the country roads, alone. No, these are best. But come. You are good and quiet. The witch will keep you if she can. Come, go to the window, and I'll have a sunbeam there for you to slide to earth upon."

It was quite a distance to the ground, but sure enough, a broad sunbeam lay right from the edge of the window-sill to the grass before the witch's door.

Floria put her hand in that of the Sun Fairy, stepped upon the sill, and in another moment was safely down, had crossed the little clearing, and was running deep into the wood.



CHAPTER III

THE BOY AND THE MAGIC BASKET

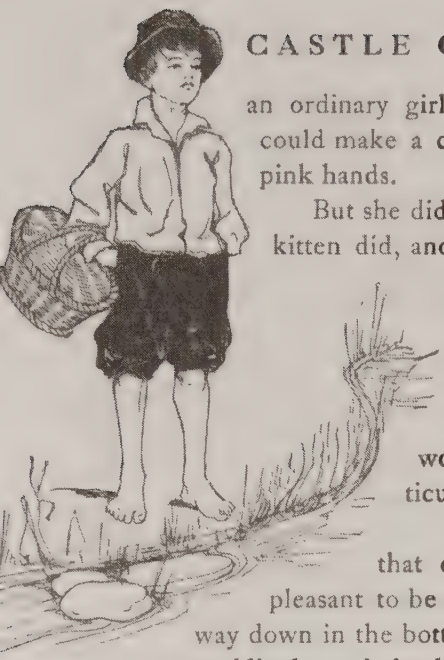
AFTER the Princess Floria left the witch's house, she ran and ran and ran. It was a very good thing, indeed, that she was an athletic sort of princess, or maybe she could not have escaped at all, for witches are hard people to get away from, and witches' cats are still worse.

But at last she felt quite safe, and sat down to rest. And then she discovered the difference between being a princess and being a little beggar girl, for the heavy shoes the old witch had given her had hurt her feet dreadfully.

"I really think," murmured Floria to herself, "I really think it would be better to go barefoot. I've always thought that would be fun!"

But it wasn't. She wasn't used to it, any more than she was to the heavy shoes, and she was glad to put them on again and limp over to a place in the woods where there was a brook. Such a merry little brook as it was, too. Such a saucy, twinkling, laughing brook, with all sorts of pools and rapids and shallows. There were tiny fish in it, and smooth brown stones, and the Sun Fairy and her sisters were bathing in the water and playing upon it, and making it smile and sparkle like diamonds and tear-drops and all sorts of shiny, sparkling things.

"How lovely," thought the Princess. "I wish I had a drink. Oh for my silver cup!" Poor little Princess! Having never been



an ordinary girl, it did not enter her head that she could make a cup of a big leaf, or her own two little pink hands.

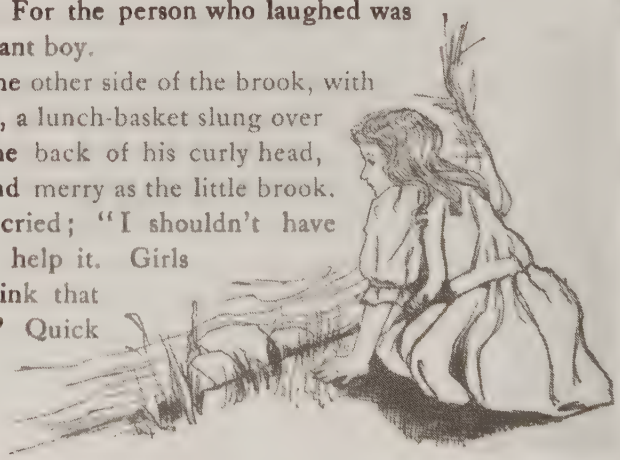
But she did think maybe she could drink as her kitten did, and so she bent down to the water and tried, but the saucy water came up and splashed into her eyes and wetted her hair.

"Ough!" cried the Princess, right out loud. But as it was'nt a real word, or wasn't said to anybody in particular, it didn't count.

What did count was a peal of laughter that came from somewhere. It is never pleasant to be laughed at, especially when you know, way down in the bottom of your heart, you must have been very ridiculous, indeed. So the Princess Floria jerked herself up straight and got red, and prepared to have that person punished; but suddenly she remembered she wasn't a princess just then, and couldn't punish people. Somehow, she didn't care about doing it anyway. For the person who laughed was a boy—such a nice, pleasant boy.

He was standing on the other side of the brook, with his hands in his pockets, a lunch-basket slung over one arm, his cap on the back of his curly head, and his face all bright and merry as the little brook.

"Beg pardon," he cried; "I shouldn't have laughed, but I couldn't help it. Girls never know how to drink that way. Here, I'll fix you." Quick



as a wink he had jumped over the brook, set down the basket, made a cup of his hands, filled it, and was holding the water to her lips. The Princess drank and drank and drank.

"Want more?" he asked. She nodded, and he gave her more. Then she leaned back and smiled at him, and bowed. Then she grew very red. It was the first time she had tried to say "thanks" without speaking, and she found it wasn't easy.

The Boy seemed to think something was wrong, too.

He put his hands in his pockets again, after drying them on a rather grubby handkerchief, and stared curiously at her, till Floria grew so red and hot she felt sure she was going to burst.

"What's the matter with you?" asked the Boy. Floria shook her head. "Are you deaf?" She shook it again.

"Have you lost your tongue?"

Floria stuck it out at him, not naughtily. She knew it was not the proper thing to do, but this seemed as though it might be an occasion when she really ought.

"Good gracious!" said the Boy.

He walked round and round and round, staring at her and whistling softly.

"Aren't you allowed to talk?" he asked.

Floria was so glad he had guessed! She jumped up to shake her head, but her feet hurt her, and she stumbled and nearly fell.

The Boy was at her side in a moment.

"Oh, goodness!" he cried, "just look at your feet. You're not used to walking much—or in such shoes! I know—there's something mysterious about you—you're under a fairy spell! That's the only thing it can be."

The Princess nodded, and the Boy stared at her, open-eyed.

Then he grunted. "Well, I don't think much of the fairies who would let a little thing like you get into such a mess," he said, loftily. "Let me look at your feet."

Though he wasn't such a very big boy, he picked Floria up in his arms and carried her to the edge of the brook, and stuck her two bleeding little feet into the water, and bathed them with the grubby handkerchief—though Floria did not notice that it was grubby at all. And she was generally very particular about such things at home.

Then he tore up the handkerchief into strips, bound the feet and patted them, and set Floria back on a bank of moss, and said, cheerily, "What next?" just as if she could talk.

She could, almost, for she had remembered, when she first went to get that drink, that she had had no breakfast at all!

Naturally, she hadn't stayed to eat with the witch and her cat, and since then there had been nothing to eat anywhere about, and she was oh! so very, very empty. She had grown hungrier every moment her eyes rested on that basket the Boy had carried upon his arm.

It was such a pretty basket—green and yellow, braided together, with a dear little top that fastened down so tight and trim, and the firmest, roundest little handles you ever saw—just the kind of basket that any little girl would love to have swinging on her arm. She couldn't help staring at it, and the Boy understood.

"The more I look at you, the more you seem like a princess."

"Kites and kittlekammers!" he cried, "I do believe you're hungry. Are you?" It was such a funny expression that Floria laughed and nodded till her pretty fair hair fell down over her eyes, and she parted it with her fingers and peeped up at him through the golden curls.

"My, what pretty hair," he said, softly. "I—really I don't believe you're an ordinary girl at all. The more I look at you, the more you seem like a princess!"

Floria flushed and hung her head. She didn't want folks to know she was a princess while she was traveling around in that way.

"Oh, well," said the Boy, lightly, "what's the odds? You're nice, anyhow, and you're awfully interesting, but you're hungry, which is most important. Mother put me up a jolly lunch. See here," and he pulled out a red napkin and spread it on the moss, and laid on it a little pile of sandwiches, with bits of pink ham peeking out from between the edges, another pile of crisp sweet crackers, one of ginger cakes, a bottle of milk, two apples and a strawberry tart.

"There's lots for two," he said, stoutly, "even if I was hungry, which I'm not. Fall to!"

And the Princess did. She had never been so hungry in her life, and the way things slipped down her little red throat was a wonder to behold.

When they had finished, he talked to her and asked her questions, and she answered as well as she could. He wanted her to go home with him and stay, but she shook her head so hard and looked so sad he said nothing more. After a while, because he had eaten very little of the lunch and was hungry, he showed her how to fish, cutting poles from the forest and bringing lines and hooks from

his pockets, and he built a fire and cleaned the little trout. They cooked them on hot stones and ate them without a bit of salt, and she thought she had never tasted anything so good, or had so fine a time, in all her life. She was very happy, till suddenly the Sun Fairy twinkled down into her eyes with a warning that it was time to go, and she got up with a little sigh.

Her feet were better, but the Boy would not let her take off the bandages, and she found they eased the heavy shoes on her feet.

"Which way must you go?" the Boy asked, soberly, as he picked up the pretty basket they had packed together. She nodded where the Sun Fairy was leading.

"West," he said. "I can't go far. There is a road in the forest there which is the end of our kingdom, and they will never let me go across, but I'll walk as far as that with you."

He took her hand, and they went slowly away, he helping her over rough places and carrying her now and then.

"Are there fairies helping you?" he asked, suddenly.

The Princess Floria nodded. "Well, they'd better be a little more careful than they have been to-day, that's all," he said, fiercely, and Floria laughed so hard she had to stop a minute; but the Boy did not laugh. He looked at her torn dress, thought of her swollen feet, and remembered how hungry she had been.

"I—I wish I could go along and help you myself," he cried stoutly, "but I suppose I can't. When folks have fairy missions they always have to go alone. There's the road over there. See, I'll take you to it."

Hand in hand they went to a worn old road, almost lost in the underbrush.

"No one uses it any more," said the Boy. "There's an old story about it—I don't know why, but it's the boundary, and I

mustn't cross. Good-bye. I think you're the nicest girl I ever knew, so there," and to Floria's astonishment he bent suddenly, kissed her, and then took to his heels and ran.

She stood staring after him, and then jumped and gave a queer little cry. He had left the pretty basket at her feet!

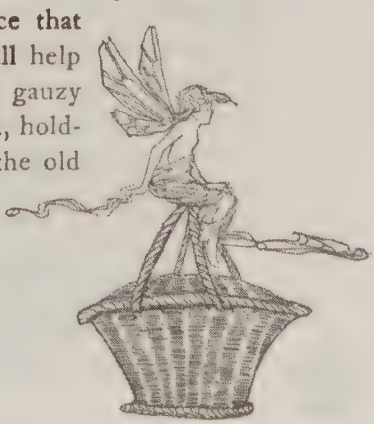
He heard her and looked back.

"I didn't forgot it," he called; "I meant to. It's for you. I—I left my apple and some crackers—for you," and he went on again, running with all his might, so that very soon he disappeared among the trees. The Princess Floria took up the little basket and hugged it tight.

It was her's—her own—a present from a friend. All the grand presents of all her life had never meant so much to her as did that little basket.

And as she looked down, she saw the Sun Fairy, plainer than she had ever yet seen her, sitting upon its green and yellow top.

"It is a magic basket," said the little voice, softly; "made magic by the love and friendship and sacrifice that gave it to you. Keep it always, Floria. It will help you in your journey," and again the floating gauzy shape vanished into the sunbeams; and Floria, holding the basket tenderly in her arms, crossed the old road and bravely entered the forest on the other side.



Her second adventure was ended.

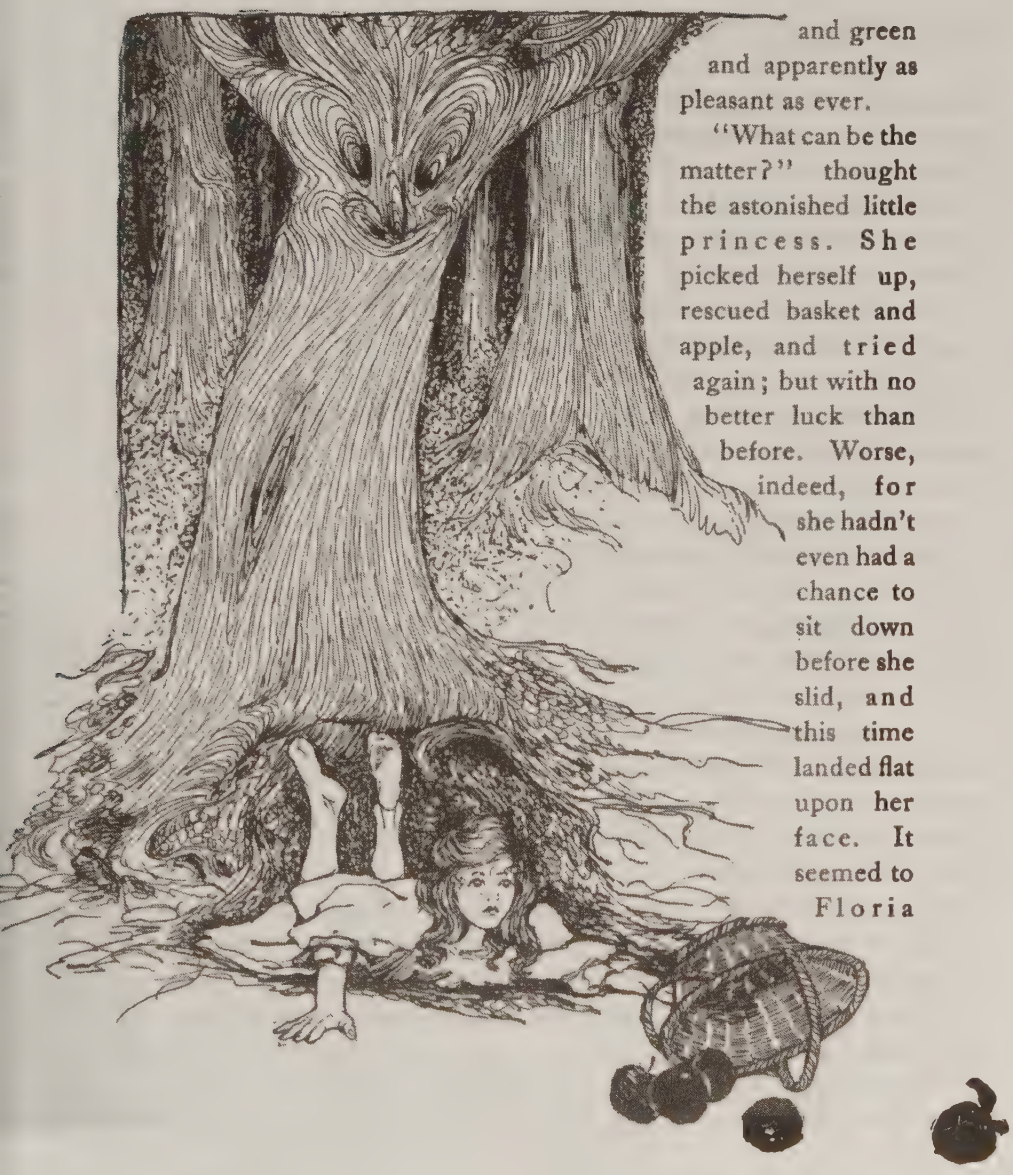
CHAPTER IV

IN THE ENCHANTED FOREST

AS soon as the Princess Floria left the Boy and started across the old moss-grown road into the further depths of the forest, she felt something queer in the very air about her. The trees did not seem like other trees, the bushes growing here and there looked odd, and so did the moss, the birds, and the rabbits or squirrels that now and then ran across her path. What it was she couldn't exactly tell. It did not frighten her, but she wondered about it a good deal. Nothing unusual happened, however, until she sat down to eat her supper. She had been very glad during the afternoon to remember that there was supper in the little magic basket. To be sure an apple and some crackers are not a very big meal, but they are a great deal better than nothing, and so the Princess Floria thought. She had learned already to be thankful for little things.

When she was very hungry, indeed, and tired, she saw a nice mossy bank before her, and thought that it was just the place to sit and eat her supper. So, picking her way towards it, she climbed to the top, sat down, and, to her great astonishment, promptly slid straight to the bottom!

Just why she slid, Floria couldn't have told. She had thought everything was all right, but there she sat, sprawled out upon the ground, with the magic basket overturned beside her, the apple rolling away across the moss, and the mound behind her, as soft



and green and apparently as pleasant as ever.

"What can be the matter?" thought the astonished little princess. She picked herself up, rescued basket and apple, and tried again; but with no better luck than before. Worse, indeed, for she hadn't even had a chance to sit down before she slid, and this time landed flat upon her face. It seemed to Floria

very much as if the mound had raised itself and deliberately shaken her off; but that wasn't likely. It must be enchanted, somehow. She was getting quite used to enchanted things now, and didn't mind them in the least. But if there was a reason why she shouldn't sit there, why all right—she'd go somewhere else, so bravely picking herself up again, she started off.

In just a step or two she stopped, for there was a big flat stone, quite as pretty as the bank, and which would be almost as comfortable. But maybe it was enchanted, too!

Floria decided to try. So, going up to it, she put one foot upon the stone, and then stood still and waited to see if anything would happen. Something did—something so strange, she just sat plump down on the ground without waiting for a mound or a rock or anything else at all—because the rock spoke to her!

There was no doubt about it—it was the rock. There wasn't a living thing in sight, and besides, the voice came right out of the stone, as plain as plain could be. Rather a rough, heavy voice, to be sure, but kindly, too.

"Don't you be worried about what's going to happen," it said, encouragingly. "I wouldn't play you a trick such as that mound over there did just now. You can lie on me, or walk on me, or use me for a dining-table, just as you please, so you don't start to quarry me, and I won't throw you off. But it's just a lesson to you not to trust these particularly soft people. They're generally treacherous at bottom. Sweetness and softness alone aren't worth an ounce of gravel. You've got to have strength and stability to be of any real account in this world," and the stone gave a low grumbling sort of laugh.

Floria did not know whether she ought to sit down on such a very accomplished rock or not, but being very tired, she did, and

pretty soon the rock began asking her questions. Although he had no eyes that she could see, he seemed to understand her nods and shakes of the head well enough, and soon got most of her story out of her—in a most astounding way, Floria thought.

"So that's why you won't talk, is it?" he queried, good-naturedly. "Oh, well, but stones and trees and beasts and things like that don't count—unless you got angry at any of us? Did you?"

Floria shook her head. Oh, if she could only say a word or two! "Well, well, then talk away. It's to people you must be dumb. With us you can talk as much as you please, and the words will come right, too—just see if they don't. And we'll all help you. Everything's enchanted around here, so you won't be in the least peculiar. Look here, I can see by your face you're afraid to try for fear of losing that temper of yours for good. Who would you believe? The Sun Fairy?" Floria nodded.

"Well, then, here goes—I'll catch her for you," and the clumsy old rock began to twist himself back and forth till a bright spot in his side caught the light, and there, sure enough, was the Sun Fairy, just resting against his grim, gray shoulder.

"Hello!" he said, gruffly, but cheerily. "What do you mean by telling this poor youngster she can't talk at all while she's hunting that temper of hers?" he demanded.

"Because it's true," said the Sun Fairy, softly. "She can't talk. She mustn't."

Floria, disappointed, but so glad she had waited, hung her head. "But," cried the old stone, crustily, "that's nonsense—anything can do as it likes here. This piece of forest doesn't belong to a soul. We can all do as we choose without asking permission. Why that unmannerly moss-bank over there just tossed

the poor child off when she tried to sit down, simply because that oak tree's been throwing acorns at it this afternoon—got a little playful, you know, and teased. The very trees wave as they please, without waiting for the wind to show them the way, and the bushes won't part to let anyone through unless they choose. Of course she can talk here. That's nonsense."

"No," said the Sun Fairy, steadily; "she can't. If she were going to stay in this bit of woods all her life, she could, of course; but she's not. She wants to find her temper and then go home. So Floria, dear, you must keep quiet, though good old Brother Rock here means well, and would like to help you."

Brother Rock shook himself so hard in his disgust that he shook himself out of position, the light left his sides, and the Sun Fairy vanished.

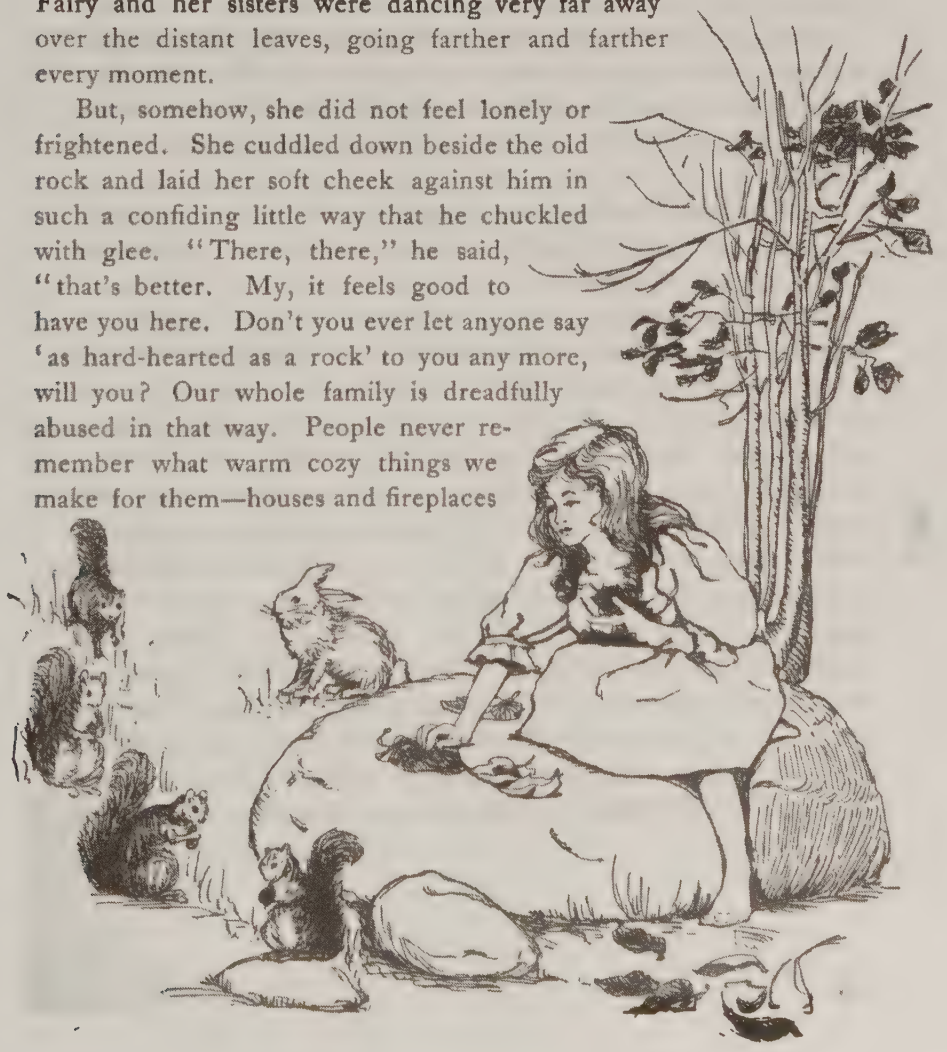
"Humph!" he cried, "it's a shame, that's what it is. Look here, just give up going, there's a good girl, and stay with me. You can sleep beside me at night. The trees will give you plenty of leaves, I know, for a bed and a coverlet. I'll get a nice pleasant good-humored moss-bank to move over here for a pillow; you can wander through this piece of forest all you please, and talk to all of us inside, and we'll all be as happy and jolly as a pile of pebbles rolling down hill. Come now, will you do it?" Floria liked the old stone and was glad he wanted her to stay with him, but she shook her head.

"Oh, well, you needn't," he cried. Then, in a friendlier way, "I shouldn't blame you, I suppose you are homesick. What's an old rock and a saucy bank of moss and a lot of independent trees to a home and a good-looking young prince some day, hey? Oh, you needn't go blushing like that. Of course there's a prince for you somewhere. There always is for every princess. But as you

won't stay with us, why I'll try to help you along as well as I can, only not to-night. It's getting late. You'd better take that bed by me for this once, anyway."

Sure enough, the forest was getting dark. Through the tree-trunks Floria could see the red glow of the sunset, and the Sun Fairy and her sisters were dancing very far away over the distant leaves, going farther and farther every moment.

But, somehow, she did not feel lonely or frightened. She cuddled down beside the old rock and laid her soft cheek against him in such a confiding little way that he chuckled with glee. "There, there," he said, "that's better. My, it feels good to have you here. Don't you ever let anyone say 'as hard-hearted as a rock' to you any more, will you? Our whole family is dreadfully abused in that way. People never remember what warm cozy things we make for them—houses and fireplaces



—ever see any better than the stone ones? Of course not. You lie quiet, and I'll fix you all snug and nice, and then I'll tell you a story, to put you to sleep. In the morning we'll see about sending you along a little faster than those two small feet can take you. Here, Jumper! Skip, my boy, hurry up! I've work for you two."

Floria opened her eyes as a white-tailed bunny and a gray squirrel, with a big gray bushy tail arching over his back, came bounding along, and stopping side by side, cocked their heads, watched her out of their bright eyes, and asked, "Yes, sir. What is it?"

"Fix up this young lady for the night. See that we do honor to the Free Wood. Everything, mind! She's tired and hungry and all the rest of it."

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. In a minute, sir," cried the two together, as though they had practised it for weeks, and without another word they hurried off. Floria could see Jumper's white tail disappearing into the wood, but Skip was only gone a second before he came back at the head of a long line of other squirrels, each carrying something in his paws. Skip leaped up onto Brother Rock's broad back and brushed it as clean and trim as could be with his bushy tail. Then he called to the others, and, chattering and laughing, they set out the dearest little supper that was ever served.

It was a real woodland feast. There were little acorn cups filled with clear spring water, piles of nuts that had been carefully gathered and stored, a broad leaf piled with sassafras root, a steaming acorn of sassafras tea, other leaves piled with berries, and a strip of white birch bark on which lay a great piece of fragrant wild honey.

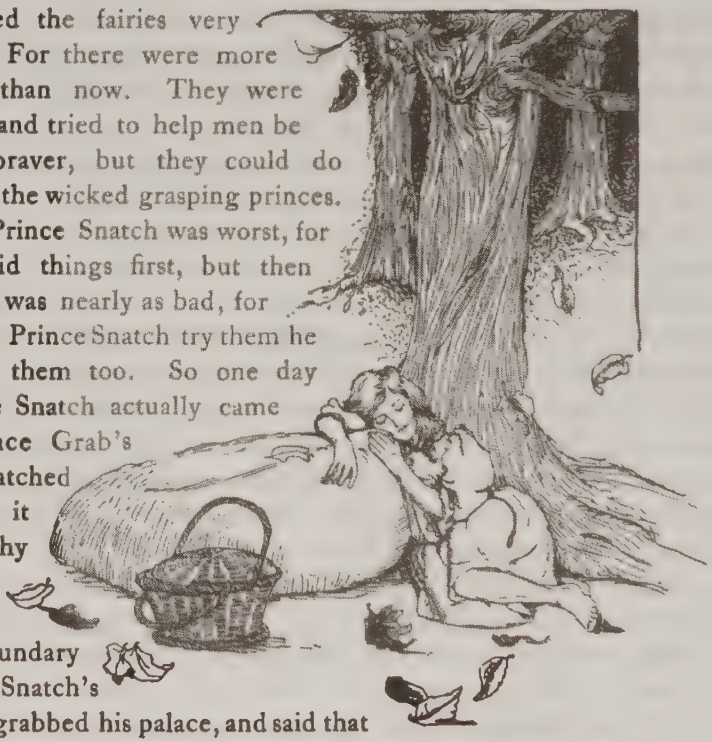
Floria's eyes grew big and bright as she watched, and when at last they had set everything down and frisked away, all but Skip, who stayed to serve her, she tucked her oak-leaf napkin under her chin and ate the good things. Then Jumper came back, bringing a kind of leaf that made her sore feet feel as well as ever. Jumper bathed the feet and washed the bandages the Boy had put upon them, laid the leaves over the sore spots, put the bandages back, and lo and behold! there wasn't any more hurt there.

Then he and his sister brought water for Floria to bathe her face, and the sister brushed her hair with a brush made of white thistle-down, and only a little of the down came off on her hair. Then they went off and brought back a pile of soft, fresh moss, that cuddled itself down into the coziest of pillows, and the squirrels went up into the trees and talked to them, and the trees threw down lots of leaves, and before Floria knew it, she was all covered up, warm and happy and tired, the rabbits and the squirrels had run away with last "good-nights," and she and old Brother Stone were left there side by side.

"Now," thought Floria, "he said he would tell me a story. I wonder if he'll remember?"

Staunch old Brother Rock! Of course he remembered; and in a minute he began.

"I'll tell you the story of this bit of enchanted woods, if you'd like," he said, and as Floria nodded so hard she nodded off a perfect shower of leaves, he went on: "Well, a long time ago, when the world was young, there were two very grasping kings. Each king wished to get all he could, and a little more, and as they lived side by side, they were always grabbing things from each other, and that made it very unpleasant for their subjects, who would have preferred to live peaceably together.



"It pained the fairies very much, too. For there were more fairies then than now. They were everywhere, and tried to help men be better and braver, but they could do nothing with the wicked grasping princes. Of the two, Prince Snatch was worst, for he always did things first, but then Prince Grab was nearly as bad, for when he saw Prince Snatch try them he always tried them too. So one day when Prince Snatch actually came over to Prince Grab's palace and snatched it, and said it was his, why Prince Grab just hurried across the boundary line to Prince Snatch's country and grabbed his palace, and said that it was his! Then there was a pretty to-do, for nobody knew who belonged where, and the people could not tell which prince they ought to obey, and there was so much fighting and disorder and unhappiness that at last the fairies simply could not stand it any longer, and they just whisked up their wands, said their magic spells, and presto, change! the two princes found themselves alone and in rags, on either side of a dark, deep forest that they had never seen before. How could they know that the forest was their two kingdoms, all turned to trees by order of the fairies?

But so it was—and is. The people were all turned to trees and flowers and beasts—and rocks—and so they will stay, while the two princes wander about the world, trying to learn to be good, kind and generous and to respect other men's property. When they have learned and are not grasping any more, they can come home again, and this forest will turn back to two kingdoms, but till then, here it is, and here it will stay. Because it belongs to no one, and will not for so many years, if ever, and because the forest things were once all people, they can all talk, and are allowed to do as they please. Princess Floria, when you reach the old castle of Giant Grumpy Grouch, if you see anything there that might help us, do it, for we'd all rather be people—real people—than sticks and stones. We've learned our lessons too, and if the princes can just come back, we'll be such model subjects. Will you, Princess Floria?"

The Princess nodded her head. It helped, somehow, to know she was not the only naughty royal person roaming around the world.

As she nodded, she fell fast asleep, there by the old rock's side, and didn't know another thing till morning.

CHAPTER V

A TRIP ON A MOVABLE PATH

AFTER her night's rest in the enchanted forest, Floria sat up, looking as fresh and sweet and bright as if she had slept in her own pretty chamber in her father's palace. Such a noise as there was about her!

The forest people had been awake for hours, and such a rustling and whispering, such a clattering and chattering, Floria had never heard before. Squirrels and rabbits were playing hide and seek, a group of bushes was crowded close together, evidently talking over very important things, and the trees were all waving in different directions, just as if there was no such thing as wind, while they straightened their leaves, shook out their twigs that had got tangled through the night, stretched their limbs for work for another day, and gossiped and laughed together.

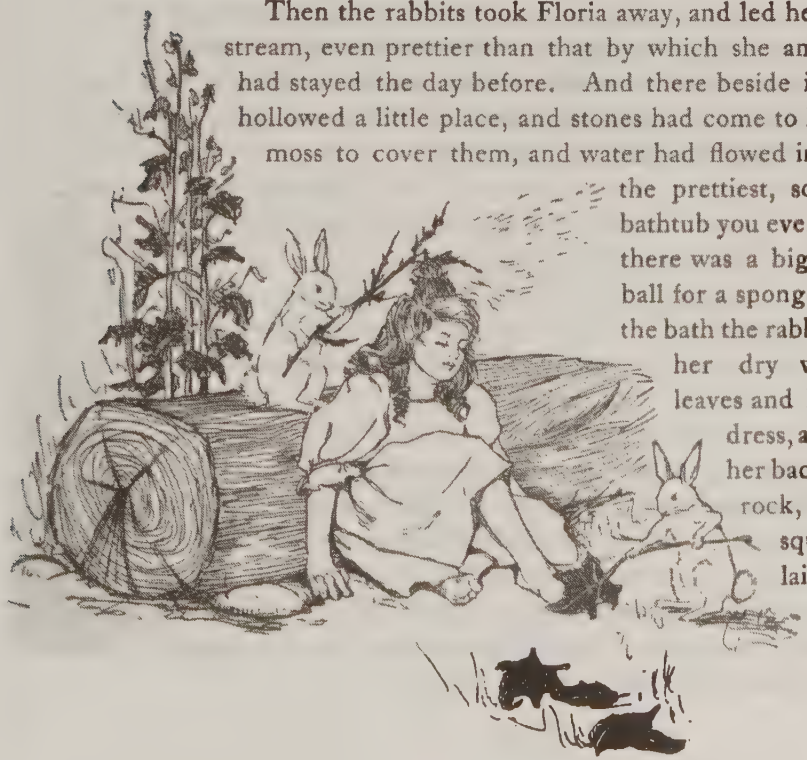
Floria lay staring at the queer sights about her for a minute before Brother Rock realized she was awake. But the minute he caught sight of her wide-open blue eyes, he cried out to the others. The rabbits and squirrels stopped their play and crowded round, the bushes straightened up and stopped talking, and the tall trees bent down to look and listen.

"Our little Princess is awake," cried Brother Rock. "Come, come, help her prepare for her journey."

"Do you think she'll really help us all out of this?" asked a tall oak, bending his head so low that Floria thought it would snap off.

"Shouldn't wonder," said Brother Rock, shortly. "Anyhow, we'll help her. We've learned that lesson at least, haven't we?"

"Yes," said the big oak. "Yes," answered the other trees. "Yes," cried the little bushes, and the beasts, and the stones, and even the moss-bank, that had been so unkind to Floria the day before, said "Yes," and told Floria she was sorry for having refused her a seat, and made her take from it the longest and loveliest bit of moss to put in her basket. "For," said the bank, "it will always bring you pleasant dreams, if you put it beneath your pillow. And sometimes when you are in great perplexity, or discouraged, it will show you what you ought to do, in your sleep, if your head is lying on it."



Then the rabbits took Floria away, and led her to a little stream, even prettier than that by which she and the Boy had stayed the day before. And there beside it they had hollowed a little place, and stones had come to line it, and moss to cover them, and water had flowed in, so it was the prettiest, softest little bathtub you ever saw. And there was a big soft puff-ball for a sponge, and after the bath the rabbits rubbed her dry with large leaves and helped her dress, and then led her back to the old rock, where the squirrels had laid breakfast for her.

For a few minutes it almost seemed to Floria that she would like to stay here, where they were so kind to her and everything was so pretty and so pleasant. But then she remembered her home, and thought, too, how these people were under a spell that maybe she could help to break if she went on. So she ate her breakfast, put the bit of dream moss into her basket, helped the squirrels pack it full of nuts and berries and flowers, and then went to say good-by to old Brother Rock. It was hard. He had been so good to her, she longed to stay or to take him with her. But she knew she couldn't do either, so she just knelt down beside him and put both arms about his rough hard old sides and kissed him again and again, and dropped a tear or two upon him, which the Sun Fairy turned to diamonds then and there.

"Good-by," said Brother Rock, huskily. "Good-by, and good luck. Don't forget us, dear little Princess."

Then she stood up and courtesied to the forest people, who bowed and nodded and cried "Good-by," "Come again," "Don't forget us," and then she started to walk away.

Brother Rock had promised to help her, but he had evidently forgotten. Anyhow, her feet had carried her so far, they could go farther. But suddenly he cried, "Here, wait a minute! Don't be in such a hurry. Give a fellow time."

Floria stopped and waited.

"Here," said Brother Rock. "As everything can do as it pleases, even the path can go where it likes. Only it must be asked properly. Now, then, Princess, go and get into the middle of it, sit down, and say what I tell you."

So Floria, feeling very strange and a little frightened at what might happen, but trusting Brother Rock, went and sat down cross-legged in the path, with her basket on her lap.

"Now," said Brother Rock, "say this, 'Abracadabra'—that's the real old-time magic word, you know—'Abracadabra, tum tum tee. Please, path, will you carry me?' and then see what happens."

Poor Floria! If he had told her the path would carry her straight to the castle of Giant Grumpy Grouch then and there, she couldn't have said it, for fear she wouldn't find her temper when she got in.

She turned and looked at Brother Rock, with tears in her eyes, and all of a sudden he remembered.

"Oh, plague take it all!" he cried, "of course you can't say it. And it's such a stubborn path, it always will be asked properly, or it won't do things. What are we to do?"

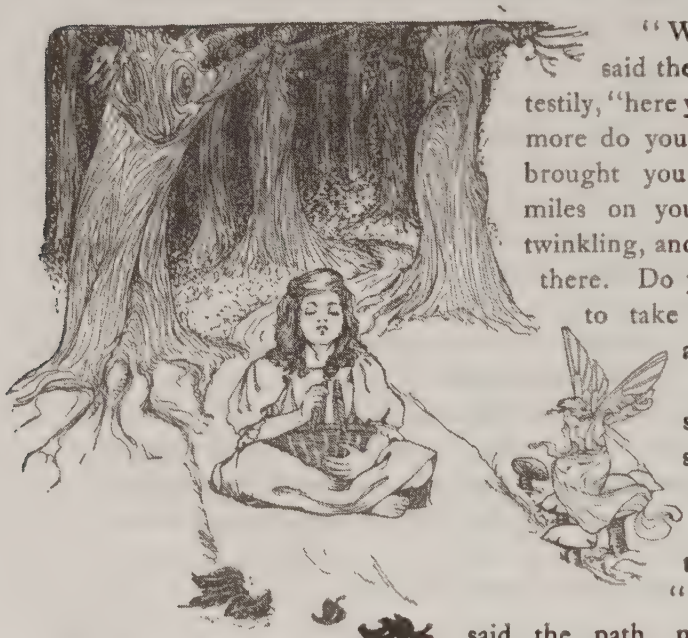
"I know," said the soft little voice that helped Floria so often; and there was the Sun Fairy, flitting across the open space beside them, her airy figure showing faintly in a splotch of sunlight. "Think it, Floria dear; think it hard, and I'll give the path ears to hear your thoughts."

So Floria thought it, hard as ever she could—

"Abracadabra, tum tum tee,
Please, path, will you carry me?"

Sure enough, before she had had even a chance to turn for one more farewell look at Brother Rock, and the trees and the rabbits and squirrels, the path seemed to take itself up, shake itself, fly through the air a minute, and then settle down again; and lo and behold, there it was—evidently a quiet, well-regulated, ordinary path once more, but in an entirely different place—running, to tell the truth, straight into a low crumbling stone wall!

Floria was so astonished she sat and blinked.



"Well, well," said the path, rather testily, "here you are; what more do you want? I've brought you miles and miles on your way in a twinkling, and you just sit there. Do you want me to take you back again?"

Floria sprang up, shaking her head hard. She wanted to go on.

"Very well," said the path, more kindly, "that's all right. You're welcome, I'm sure. I suppose you'd say thanks if you could, and just at present I can't hear you think, so we'll take it for granted. Now, I've brought you to the end of the enchanted kingdoms. Climb that wall, and though you'll still be in a forest, it's not our forest. I wouldn't advise you to leave the forests, by the way. People on farms and in towns have ways of asking questions, and not letting little girls travel alone. They don't understand, you see. Now then, good-by. Think I'll go back to the old place. Got acquainted there, and like it. Don't forget us, will you? And if you see two princes snatching and grabbing things, spank them if you can, though I hope they've learned better manners,

as we have, who used to be their subjects. And just tell them we're tired of being things, and are willing to be people, if it's possible. Good-by. Take care of yourself and trust the Sun Fairy," and with another queer little humping jerk, the path picked itself up again and vanished.

Floria stared after it for a moment; then thinking to herself, "Come, come, there's no use staring backward like that, I must hurry on," she went up to the wall, put her foot upon a stone, and in another moment had climbed over and found herself in another stretch of woodland, where she did not have the curious feeling she had had when she entered the enchanted forest. Here everything was quite natural. The trees all blew one way, the bushes did not move around at all, and the whispering sounds were not voices, but just the leaves rustling in the wind.

The day passed without any adventure whatever. Floria walked as far as she could—which was a long way to-day; for her feet were becoming accustomed to travel, and she herself was getting stronger and stronger in the fresh outer air, of which, as a princess with so very, very many lessons to learn all the years round, she had really never had enough.

At noon she sat down on a little mound, which did not throw her off, but behaved exactly as a bank should, and ate her lunch of nuts and berries, and, throwing herself back on the ground, rested for a little. Then she got up and went on; and not a soul did she meet, and not a beast did she see throughout the day. It was so still in the forest it seemed strange and lonely.

"I do hope," thought Floria, "that I won't have to sleep alone here all night. What ever should I do?"

But as night came on, it seemed as though there was nothing else for it. And to make matters worse, the Sun Fairy rushed up

to her suddenly and whispered in an almost frightened way, "Good-night, dear, I must go early —early. There's a storm coming. Be brave and trust—" but what or who she was to trust this time Floria did not find out. For all of a sudden the sun went under a great black cloud, the forest grew dark, the wind rose, and Floria was left alone, crouching at the foot of a tall tree.

"But I'd better not do that," she thought wisely; "I've heard that lightning was very apt to strike trees. I'd better get into the bushes;" and she crept away toward a clump of bushes not far off, pulled them close about her head, and lay there waiting for the storm to break, and thinking, after all, there were some good things about having poor clothes. The rain would not hurt this dress a particle!

The Princess was a sensible little girl and had never been afraid of storms, so she was more lonely than anything else, as she

watched the great trees bend and sway, and the sky, through the tops, grow darker and darker.

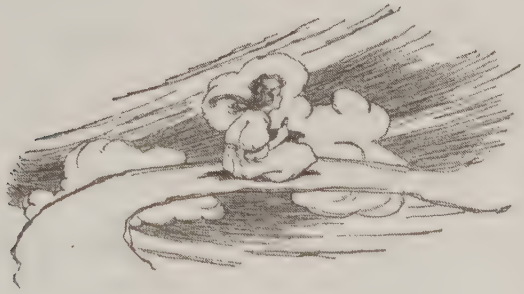
"Oh, if there was only somebody with me!" thought the forlorn little Princess.

When suddenly she felt something touch her hand softly, and then, before she could turn her head to see, the sky went very black, and she couldn't have seen her own hand if she had tried ever so long.

But a very kindly voice was saying, "Why, brother, it's a little girl. Come, child. Come with us. Follow close," and Floria heard the pattering of little footsteps.

Whatever it was, the voice had been friendly. Maybe this was the something the Sun Fairy had tried to tell her to trust.

At any rate, as there was nothing else that she could do, the Princess Floria picked up her magic basket and followed.



CHAPTER VI

THE STORY OF THE LITTLE LOST PRINCE

PATTER, patter, patter, went the little feet ahead, and Floria had almost to run, or she would have been left behind.

She had hardly time to wonder where she was going, and what she would see when she got there. To tell the truth, she was so used to astonishing things by this time that she would have been more surprised if they had not happened than she was when they did.

"Stoop low," cried the voice before her, "the doorway is very small."

Floria obediently ducked her head, passed under a low black arch that seemed of rock, felt her feet touching a thick bed of dried leaves, and then she saw a dim light ahead of her and went toward it.

The light came from a little, smouldering fire, built in the middle of a big shadowy cave. Inside the roof was high, so high it just went up and up in great masses of shadows, so that Floria felt very small indeed, and a little frightened.

Close by the fire were three foxes—an old, old fox, so old that even his tail was white, and two others, one of whom seemed very tired. He was stretched out on his side, panting, while the third fox licked his feet, and the old fox listened gravely to the story he had been telling.

"Poor Floria shook her head again and looked pleadingly at him."

Beside Floria were two other foxes. One was a very young and handsome fellow, who stood close at her side, his cool wet nose snuggled in her hand.

"Here, here," said Grandfather Fox, looking sharply at the three from under his bushy white eyebrows. "What have we here?"

"A little girl, Grandfather," said the other fox, who had gone up close to the fire. "Loris and I found her alone in the wood, and as there was a storm coming on, Loris was sorry for her and brought her home. Most likely her people will go hunting her, and their dogs will track her here, and we shall suffer. I told him not to do it."

"Bring her here, Loris," said Grandfather Fox. And Floria and the handsome young fox moved forward together.

Grandfather Fox looked at her kindly, though evidently he was a little uneasy too.

"Are you lost, my dear?" he questioned.

Floria shook her head.

"Not lost? Where are your traveling companions?"

Princess Floria shook her head again, and threw out her hands to show them she was all alone.

Grandfather Fox understood. "All alone," he cried, "here, in the night-time? Why, what is your name? Who are you?"

Poor Floria shook her head again and looked pleadingly at him. It was so hard not to be able to talk to people who were kind and asked things politely. If she ever got where she could talk again, she was sure she would never say any but the pleasantest things.

Something seemed to interest the old fox very much, and the one who looked so tired sat up suddenly and stared hard at her. Then he limped over and sniffed at her, and looked at her

hands and up into her face. He went back and whispered to Grandfather Fox, and for some reason they both looked glad, and a little sorry too.

"Loris did well," said Grandfather Fox. "We must always help everyone we can, even if it may put us in danger. But this will bring no harm to any one, and maybe much good. Come, child; come and warm yourself."

Floria crept closer to the fire, and spread out her skirts and her long fine hair to dry, and glanced timidly up at the great black roof, over at the little group of foxes talking so earnestly, and down at the small red fire, and Loris' bright, kind face beside her. What a very strange place for a little girl, to be sure! It was like a robbers' cave, with the beasts instead of robbers. They were better than robbers—much better, she knew—and the fire was warm, and the ground soft, and the high roof not quite so awful; and somehow, before she knew it, Floria was sound asleep.

When she awoke, the fire was out, soft daylight was creeping in through the low, ragged archway of the door, and Loris was looking around at her with the same kind eyes that had been the last things she remembered at night. She had slept all those hours with her head on his soft, warm fur.

When he saw she was awake, he jumped up, shook himself—"and no wonder! He must be very tired, holding me so long," thought Floria—and then said brightly, "Good-morning. Hope you're feeling well to-day. The storm's all over. Anything you want?"

Anything she wanted? Floria wanted breakfast. She had fallen asleep the night before without supper, she had been so tired; so now she was hungry enough for both times, and not a thing to eat!

Loris led her back into the cave, to a place where a tiny spring bubbled up in the soft darkness, and there she bathed her face, and took a deep drink of the clear, cool water. But though spring water is very good and she was very glad to get it, still it does not stand one instead of supper and breakfast, and the Princess' poor little insides were so empty she almost felt that she could have eaten her own shoestrings, if they'd had cream and sugar on them.

The young fox seemed to understand, for he looked at her pityingly. "What's in your basket?" he asked. "Haven't you something to eat there?"

Floria shook her head. There was the bit of magic moss, that was to send her sweet or wise dreams, and maybe there was a cracker left—but all of a sudden she remembered. The Sun Fairy had said it was a magic basket. Then it ought to hold all sorts of things. And sure enough, when she threw back the top, there before her lay a row of nicely buttered rolls, all fresh and hot, as though straight from the kitchen; and there was a big mug full of fresh sweet milk, and a red apple, almost as big as the basket; and oh, joy of joys, another mug, with some soft-boiled eggs, all peppered and salted and ready to eat!

Floria gasped with delight. Down she plumped then and there, and ate till she sighed with happiness. She did not forget Loris, either, but gave him hot rolls, which somehow

he did not seem to like till they were cold, and let him drink from her mug of milk, which was a truly wonderful mug, for it never seemed to be emptied, but was always sitting there full, no matter how much either one drank.

After breakfast, Floria felt like a new girl, and jumped up bright and ready to go on with her journey. With a basket like that to help her she felt she could go anywhere.

But Loris said, "You mustn't go just yet. Grandfather Fox wishes to see you. Bring your basket and come with me."

Floria turned to pack up what was left of her breakfast, but, strange to say, it wasn't there. Mug and milk, apple-core and crumbs, had vanished quite away, the cover was fastened tight on the little basket once more and everything was trim for the journey. Wondering, but satisfied, Floria picked up her magic treasure, smoothed her pretty hair, shook out her skirts, and followed Loris.

He led her outside, where, in a great patch of bright sunshine, Grandfather Fox was sitting, with the other fox who had seemed so weary the night before, and who still was lame.

Grandfather Fox smiled kindly and said, "Good-morning." Then he told her to sit down. For a moment everything was still.

Then Grandfather Fox began to speak.

"Once upon a time," he said softly—and Floria listened attentively, for she always liked a story—"once upon a time there was a little Prince whom everybody loved. He was a bright and handsome little fellow, but nobody told him all the things he ought to know. They taught him all sorts of history and arithmetic and grammar, and how to ride and how to shoot and do other things they said a man should do. But they never told him the most important thing of all—that a man should keep his temper."

Floria moved uneasily.

This story was getting entirely too much like her own. "He had a great deal of temper," went on Grandfather Fox, "as most boys have, and it was hard to keep track of it all; and one day he got so tired of trying that he said he wouldn't ever try again. He was a Prince anyhow, and he meant to be good and kind, and if people didn't like these bits of temper that flew out and got lost, he didn't care. They'd just have to stand it, and do the best they could. He'd never bother with the temper any more. And then, sure enough, he never had to! For instead of flying off in pieces, the whole temper went away, and the Prince found he could not get on without it after all. He really was a very nice Prince at heart, and truly meant to be kind and tried to be wise, for he wished to rule well when he was a man; so the fairies were sorry for him, and thought they would give him one more chance. They told him where the temper was, and how he must try to get it, and that all the time he was trying, he must be alone and must never speak. So he went out into the world; but he could not remember what he was told, and though he tried hard, he spoke!"

Floria was leaning forward, red and breathless. Oh, what had happened to the poor little Prince? What would happen to her if she should forget and speak?

Grandfather Fox looked at her for a few moments. She nodded hard at him. Why would he not go on?

"He was enchanted," said Grandfather Fox slowly; "he was enchanted, and he is enchanted now. And he is lost. His kingdom is waiting for him just as it was. It will never change till he comes back to claim it. He can go there, he can see his people, but he cannot talk to them, and they do not know him. And"—Grandfather Fox's voice grew very low and solemn—"and he can never

be released from his enchantment till a princess, as royal as he, shall undergo the same punishment, lose her temper, go through the search, travel alone, never speak, find the Castle of Sulks—where both their tempers are, with, I am sorry to say, many, many more—release them all from the hands of Old Giant Grumpy Grouch, and so break the spell."

Floria straightened, her cheeks red, her eyes bright with excitement. So not only her own future, but that of this poor young Prince, depended on her. She fairly screwed her lips together, and determined for the hundred and nineteenth time that nothing should induce her to open them for a single "Oh!"

Grandfather Fox looked at her sharply through his spectacles. "All this," he went on, "all this happened many, many years ago.

Since then no princess has lost her temper—or, at any rate, no princess has wished it away for always. But now we have heard of such a one at last, and we think there is hope for the little lost Prince." Poor Floria blushed and hung her head. How sad she felt, and how ashamed!

"This friend," said Grandfather Fox, pointing to the weary fox, "has just brought me news that in a far-away kingdom such a thing has happened at last. A little Princess, very good and sweet and kind, but not thoughtful, has wished her temper away, and has had to wander out to find it—and we know that it is you."

Floria nodded, and a tear or two crept out and fell on her hot cheeks. It was dreadful to have even the beasts know her story.

Grandfather Fox took her hand in his paws and patted it. "Never mind, dear," he said, as softly as the Sun Fairy herself could have said it, "never mind. Be brave and strong now, not only for yourself, but for this poor little Prince, too, and remember you alone can save him. And, because we are sorry for you both, and wish to aid you, I will do all I can to help you on your journey. See, I give you a little silver whistle," and hanging it round her neck by a cord, he put it to her lips. "Blow," he said.

Floria blew, and instantly she heard a rustling and a bustling and a pattering of feet, till she thought she must be back in the enchanted forest. But no; in a moment, from bushes and trees came foxes—young foxes and old, fat ones and thin, pleasant-faced foxes and some that looked wicked or worn, or very, very tired.

They came and sat about Floria in a great circle, staring at her, not unkindly, and Grandfather Fox said, "They are all your servants. When you want help, blow upon your whistle, and all my children in hearing distance will come and help you all they can. There will be much we cannot do—much that we can. Remember, children, at the call of the whistle you give all your wits and all your fleetness and all your strength to help the Princess Floria. Now go."

The foxes rose and went away as quickly as they had come, and again the forest stood about them, tall and very still.

"Now," said Grandfather Fox, "you may start upon your journey. Loris goes with you for a time. He will be your special friend. Be steadfast, Floria, and true. My friend tells me, in your country they are waiting, and trusting, and loving you. Remember that—and the little Prince. Good-by."

Grandfather Fox turned and went into the cave.

Floria waved her hand to him, and then, with her fingers on Loris' soft neck, stepped out into the forest. Her journey was begun again.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRINCESS FLORIA IS CAPTURED

FOR some days Floria and her good friend Loris journeyed on safely through the wood together. Now and then they came in sight of clearings, where there were single farms, or villages, or good-sized towns. But they always went round them in the night.

For Floria remembered what the wise little path in the Free Forest had said about people's trying to hinder little girls who were alone, and she did not wish to be hindered.

The Sun Fairy had told her to always follow as she pointed, and so Floria did.

She was quite used to travel now. Loris was the jolliest companion ever anybody had, and during the day they frolicked and ran, paddled in the brooks, chased the Sun Fairy from patch to patch of sunlight in the forest, got the rabbits and squirrels to talk to them and tell them stories, or persuaded the birds to sing them songs.

It was a beautiful time—pleasant and happy, with plenty to eat in the magic basket, warm little mossy nooks to sleep in, with Loris' soft coat for a pillow, and clear, cool little brooks to bathe in and drink from.

The Princess Floria thought sometimes that she had never been happier in all her life. It was a different kind of happiness, at least, and if she only could have forgotten her home and her

dear father, and that naughty, naughty temper of hers that she had lost, she would have wished it might go on and on for ever.

But she did want to go home, and she also wanted to help the poor little Prince, whose name she did not even know, and maybe the people in the Enchanted Forest.

Besides, she did not know what had happened to the Prince when he forgot, and talked, and it might have been something pretty dreadful—was, she feared, from the way Grandfather Fox had spoken. If she gave up her search, she might have a very unhappy time indeed.

So she kept steadily on her way, never loitering except when she was very tired, and the Sun Fairy told her that she was doing nicely, and getting much nearer to the end of her journey, when one day something very unpleasant happened.

The Princess Floria was caught!

It all came about in this way. She and Loris had risen very early that morning. It had rained the day before, and they had had to creep in under a ledge of rocks, where Loris had lain before her, so that, though his beautiful fur was quite soaked, she had kept dry. They had stayed there all night, too, and had started on their way early, partly so Loris' coat could dry quickly in the sunshine, partly so they could make up the time that they had lost.

Along about noon they met a bear. He came lumbering out from a clump of bushes, yawning and stretching himself and standing right in their very path. Floria couldn't resist a little cry of terror. She had never met anything like this before, in all her travels through the forest, and she was frightened.

"Humph!" said the bear; "goodness gracious sakes alive! Oh, my claws and creepers, what in the name of sweet stuff have we here?" And he sat plump down and stared at them.

"A little girl," said Loris rather sharply. "Didn't you ever see one before, that you can't act any better?"

"Certainly I've seen them," said the bear; "certainly I know how to act. Come here, my dear, and let me give you a good, big hug."

Floria shrank back in fear, and Loris laughed.

"No, you don't," he said, getting in front of her. "Your hugs aren't as pleasant as they might be, Brother Bruin. Besides, you mustn't. She's under the protection of the Forest, not to mention the Sun Fairy. You wouldn't be able to have a good, quiet sun bath for a dozen million years, you great hulking thing, if you so much as hurt her little finger."

"Oh, well," said Brother Bruin, putting down his arms and scrambling up again, "that's different, of course. I didn't understand. What is she, anyhow—an enchanted princess, a beggar

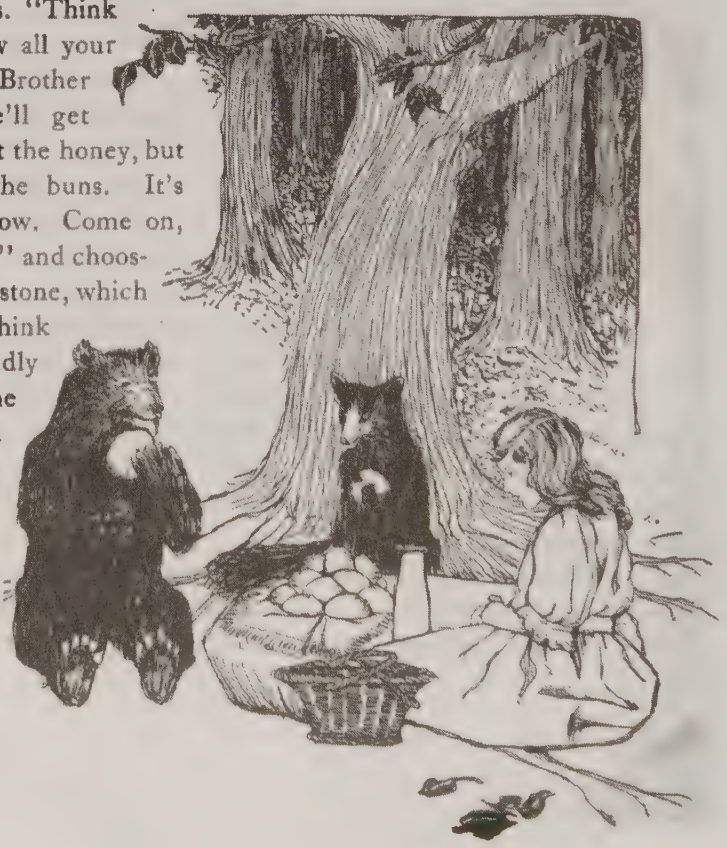
girl in trouble, a fairy in disguise, or a long-lost heiress? Do you know?"

"She's a child to be looked after," said Loris, "and she'll give you sweet buns for lunch if you're agreeable to her."

The silliest expression came over that old bear's face. Such a foolish grin of delight and longing and friendliness!

"Agreeable?" he cried; "my dear fellow, I adore her. I always do adore children, especially little girls with buns. I—I—my dear, if you give me some, I'll show you where there's a tree full of wild honey—truly I will."

"Yes, so maybe she'll go and help you get it and be stung," laughed Loris. "Think I don't know all your tricks, old Brother Bruin? We'll get along without the honey, but we'll have the buns. It's lunch-time now. Come on, let's sit here;" and choosing a big flat stone, which made Floria think of her friendly old rock in the Enchanted Forest, Loris, who helped Floria in carrying her basket, set it down, Floria



pulled off the lid, and there, sure enough, lay a great pile of sweet buns, each with strawberry jam spread upon it.

Brother Bruin gave a great, long-drawn "Oh-h-h" of pure delight, put out one great paw, picked up a bun, put it in his mouth, and then shut his little eyes and rolled his great body in happiness.

"They're the best," he cried, "the best I ever tasted," and he didn't care at all when Loris laughed at him. Floria laughed a little, too. She wasn't frightened any more, and soon got used to the big, awkward, good-natured fellow, so that, after lunch was finished, when he asked her to get up on his broad back and ride a little way, she didn't feel afraid to try it.

With much pulling at his thick, shaggy hair, she scrambled up. Loris set the magic basket before her, and Brother Bruin started off at a shambling trot, that took them over the ground at a really surprising rate of speed. Floria wouldn't have imagined the great, clumsy fellow could have gone so fast. As they went, he and Loris talked the gossip of the forest, and Floria listened with all her ears, for she was learning to be deeply interested in the doings of the new world in which she had come to live.

"Things are changing—changing for the worse," she heard Brother Bruin say, in answer to something Loris asked. "There's not enough peace in these woods any more, and as soon as my

children are of school age, we'll move somewhere else, where I won't be frightened every time they are out of my sight."

"Why, what's wrong?" asked Loris quickly.

"Hunters," said Brother Bruin, with a shake of his head. "There weren't any in the Prince's time. But lately, since this new upstart has gone and set himself upon the throne and claimed the kingdom, all sorts of unpleasant things are happening. And the worst is hunting parties—dogs and men. They come into the forest and pester us dreadfully; though they're such poor shots there's really little danger—not to mention the fact that they're awful cowards. But it's unpleasant, and they may learn to shoot. I'm going to move."

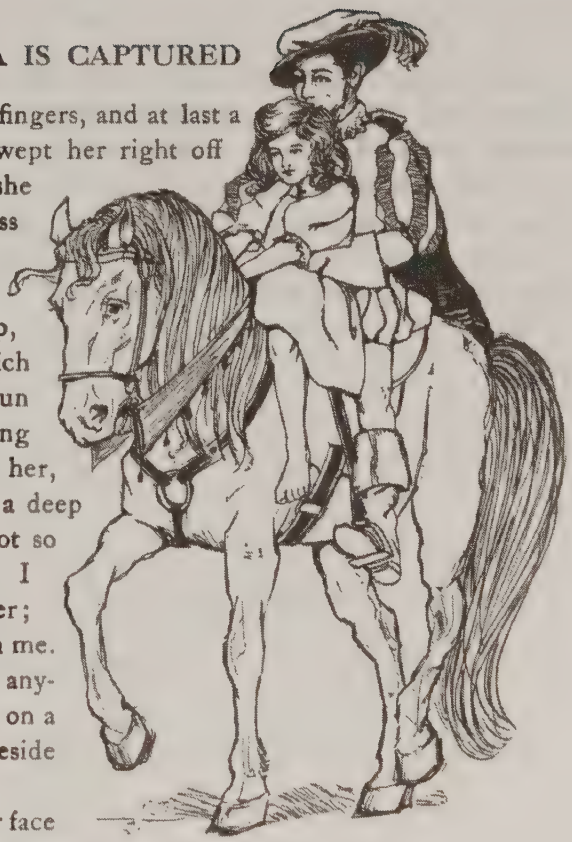
"Too bad, too bad," said Loris, so sadly that Floria was almost frightened, though just why she couldn't tell. "We'll have to be careful ourselves. Hunters don't shoot children; but as for me —well, I must look out. And I don't think the Princess would like to be caught."

"Oh, so she is a Princess, is she?" cried Brother Bruin. "There, you've given it away. Well, you tell her to go find our Prince. We need him badly. It's time he was at home; and when he comes, I'll move back here. In the meantime—"

But what was to happen in the meantime Floria never knew; for all of a sudden they heard, shrill and clear, though very far away, the sweet, high notes of a hunting-horn.

"There—there they are this minute," cried Brother Bruin. "Now we must get to cover. Hang tight, little Princess. Loris, this way. I know where to hide from all of them;" and crouching lower, the big, good-natured bear started through the underbrush.

Loris followed, and Floria tried to hold fast. But the thick, strong branches caught at her dress like hands, sharp twigs slapped



at her cheeks, thorns tore her fingers, and at last a larger branch than the rest swept her right off Brother Bruin's back, and she landed with a thud on the grass of a tiny open space he was just crossing.

In a moment she was up, grasping the magic basket, which had fallen too, and trying to run after. But an arm, a big, strong human arm, reached round her, two hands lifted her up, and a deep voice said: "Not so fast, not so fast, my dear. Being alone, I wouldn't tackle your charger; but you, I think, I'll take with me. What sort of a child are you, anyway—riding about the woods on a big black bear, with a fox beside you?"

For a minute Floria hid her face and was quiet. What a dreadful thing! Captured by this strange, big man—a man with bold black eyes and a face that was handsome, but not so kindly as she would have liked.

Then, as she felt his grasp lighten a little, she gave one jump, hoping to be free, and when he caught her again, she fought hard.

If she had only thought then and put that tiny silver whistle to her lips! But she had almost forgotten she had it; Loris alone could not help, though he came back and tried, and the man promised to set the dogs on his track directly.

It was no use. Floria was caught. The big man raised her to the saddle of a tall black horse, mounted, and rode off through the trees, with poor frightened Floria sitting there before him.

Her only comfort was that she had managed to keep tight hold of her pretty magic basket.

And suddenly, for one little moment, she saw the Sun Fairy perched upon its green-and-yellow top.

She was not quite deserted after all.

CHAPTER VIII

WHERE THE PRINCESS WAS SENT

THE great black horse went crashing through the forest, with Floria and the huntsman on his back. They could hear the sounds of the hunting-horns growing nearer and nearer, till at last out they came into a beautiful green meadow, where, underneath a great spreading elm, was drawn up the hunting party.

Such a gorgeous scene! Big prancing horses, their saddles trimmed with silver and gold, their bridles gay with tassels; men in green, with big dogs beside them, and the hunters themselves in green and scarlet coats, shining boots, and hats with sweeping plumes.

They were waiting for someone, and as the black horse came dashing out from the forest, they set up a shout—"Here he is; here's Huford now. What has he brought with him? As you live, it's a little child."

And some of the men came riding up and looked at Floria and laughed.

"A child—maybe," said Huford. "I'm not so sure what she is. She fights like a tiger and cries like a kitten. And where do you think I found her? Riding through the woods on the back of a bear, with a handsome young fox trotting along beside her."

"She's a wild girl," cried one.

"I think she is," said Huford, "for she can't talk."

"How do you know she can't?" asked a queer, piping little voice. It was a voice Floria had not heard before, and was such an odd one that she raised her head to see to whom it could belong. And there, in the middle of the hunting party, she saw the queerest figure, a thin little man, on a very big horse; a man who was so short and so slender he was funny anyway, and had made himself lots funnier by trying to look big. For all his clothes were padded outrageously. His wobbly shoulders stuck far out beyond his pipestem arms. His chest swelled with cotton batting. Even his shoes were too big; his toes reached just about half way to the tips. And as for his big plumed hat—that sat so far away from his face that his head looked like a peanut stuck under a sauce-plate.

"Your Majesty," said Huford, "I think she can't talk, because she does not."

Floria quite jumped. That mean-looking, funny-looking little man the King! How unlike her great, handsome, good-natured father!

She could hardly believe it. But everybody was bowing before him, and Huford went on.

"I've tried to make her talk, your Majesty; but if she can she will not. Maybe she could talk to the beasts. She cannot talk to men."

"Take her up to the dogs," piped the little King; "take her up to the dogs, and make her talk to them. I want to see her do it."

That was such a funny, childish order that Floria laughed in spite of herself.

"There," cried Huford, "if she cannot talk, at least she understands. See, she is laughing."

"We will find out," said the King. "Child, advance."

He was as pompous about it as if he were giving orders to a whole army. Floria, with Huford beside her, came nearer.

"Kneel," commanded the King.

Now that was hard. Floria, as a Princess herself, had never had to kneel to anybody before, and she did not like beginning with this silly little man; so she stood upright.

"She does not understand," said the King decidedly; "if she did, how could she fail to kneel before my commanding presence?"

Floria giggled; but Huford, in a kinder tone than he had yet used, whispered in her ear, "If you do understand, Midget, you'd better not laugh at his Royal Highness. It won't be safe." And she grew quite sober again.

The King leaned from his horse and poked one thin finger at her as if she had been a toad, or a turtle, or something else it would not be quite nice to touch.

"Child," he demanded, "do you hear?"

Floria nodded.

"She does understand," cried everybody, and they all crowded closer.

"Child," went on the King, "do you talk?"

Floria shook her head.

"Why?" demanded the King. As Floria could not answer that question without saying something, she naturally kept still, and the King grew angry.

"Take her to jail," he cried.

Huford mildly suggested that if she could not talk, she could only answer questions with "yes" or "no," as she could nod or shake her head.

"Under those circumstances she escapes my anger," said the King. "Child, have you lost your tongue?"

Floria nearly cried when she remembered who had asked her that question before. If he had only been as friendly and nice as the Boy!

Now she did not care whether she was ill-mannered or not, so she stuck her tongue out as far as it would go, and took a certain naughty satisfaction in keeping it there for a moment.

"Mercy, mercy," cried the King, backing his big horse away, and looking almost frightened, "what a naughty wild thing it is!" Then he laughed a little. "What shall we do with her?" he demanded.

All the courtiers looked from one another to Floria and then at the King.

"She stuck the tongue out as far as it would go, and took a certain naughty satisfaction in keeping it there for a moment."

"Let her go," said Huford kindly. "I only brought her in to amuse your Majesty. Let her go back and find her bear and fox again."

"No, no," cried the King in his high, thin voice; "she has amused me, she shall amuse me some more. Besides, we haven't a specimen like this, and we can't afford to lose it. I shall put her in my menagerie."

"In your menagerie!" cried the others in astonishment. "Why, your Majesty, she's only a little girl!"

"But she's a wild girl, isn't she?" cried the King, quite red with rage. "You said yourselves she was wild, and so she's valuable, and I'll have her. She'll be at home among the animals —you know she will. Besides, we must give the Princess Vanita a chance to see her."

"Yes, yes," cried some of the courtiers; but the others were silent.

It was quite evident that they did not think it was a nice way to treat a little girl, wild or tame either.

But there was nothing to do about it. The King had decided. So off they all rode, away from the woods—for they had forgotten the hunt in the excitement of finding Floria—back towards the city.

Floria sat in front of Huford, on the tall black horse, and thought. She did not want to be shut up in a menagerie, but still there might be a better chance for the foxes to help her. Maybe she could get away now, by herself! And as they went riding through a little strip of forest, she tried to slip down from the horse's back, thinking maybe she could hide in the tall weeds and get back to Loris and Brother Bruin; but Huford held her tight.

"No, no, my little lady," he cried gaily; and then bending nearer, he said, "I've a notion, Midget, I've a very great notion, that you are not at all what you seem. I think that you could talk as well as anybody if you only chose. Look here, now, I'll make a bargain with you. If you'll say something—only two or three words—I'll let you go, and say the fairies came and spirited you away, and that you are a fairy child, as I half believe you are. The King will forgive me, because I make him laugh more than all the others put together, and he likes that, and couldn't get on without me. But if you won't speak, why into his cage you go, as sure as ducks are ducks. Understand?"

Floria nodded. Oh, what a temptation! If she spoke only two words she could get down, be free to run off into the forest, blow her little silver whistle, which she had remembered by this time, and go on her way with dear bright Loris and jolly old Brother Bruin. If she didn't, she would be shut in a horrid cage, like a wild beast, to be stared at by a lot of curious, ill-mannered people. It was too much. With a gasp she opened her mouth. "All right; let me go quick," was just on the tip of her tongue, when suddenly she remembered, and shut her lips so tight they hurt, and so quickly that she nearly bit the end from that little pink tongue.

For she remembered that if she spoke, very likely she couldn't go on with Loris and Brother Bruin after all. She remembered her poor lost temper, and what the Sun Fairy had told her of the way to win it back, and Grandfather Fox's tale of the little lost Prince, who spoke as she was going to do.

Oh, she remembered it all, every bit of it; and so, though it was very, very hard, she shook her head and looked at Huford with tears in her blue eyes.

WHERE THE PRINCESS WAS SENT

"Then into a cage you go," said Huford, though he was sorry for her too. She was so very pretty, and she looked so sad!

However, there was no help for it now. They were out of the strip of forest, galloping across a plain towards a city that lay in the midst of it.

Such a beautiful city! The most beautiful that Floria had ever seen; lovelier even than her own. It had great white marble palaces, and churches with high white spires and graceful golden domes, and there were tall trees and green lawns, many lovely flowers, and fountains sparkling in the sun-

shine. In the center was the most beautiful building of all—the King's palace.

They rode up to the great flight of marble steps before it, and Huford got down from the horse, and took the Princess Floria in his arms, and followed the others up the steps and through a big hall into a wonderful room, where at one end there were two golden thrones. "You're to be shown to the Princess Vanita," he whispered. "She is the lady the King will soon marry. Be on your best behavior, Midget, or you may get what you don't like. See, there she is."

Floria looked, and there, sitting on one of the thrones, was a very big girl—just as big as the King was little.

Tall and fat, but rather handsome too. She was dressed all in the cloth of gold, with ermine trimmings, and before her were all the jewelers in the kingdom, with stacks upon stacks of crowns, and she was trying them on, one after another, to see which style became her best.

"Aha, my dear!" squeaked the little King, "trying to see what royalty is like, are you? That's it—practice up a bit."

The Princess Vanita grew red all over her fat face.

"I don't need to practice at all," she cried; "I at least was born royal, if not a queen; and there isn't anybody who may step into my shoes some day, either. I'm not haunted."

Floria jumped. The King didn't look big enough to be haunted either, but he evidently was; for at the speech he turned pale, glanced fearfully behind him, and trembled, while all the courtiers looked scared.

But he soon recovered and cried out, "Now, now, my dear, what's the use of raking up the past? Let it be, and come see the present that I've brought you!"

"And look at her she did—up and down and all around."

"What is it?" asked the Princess, with hardly any interest in her voice, "a diamond tooth-brush or a bulldog?"

She was so used to presents that they did not excite her at all, even the best, and she got very little pleasure out of them in consequence.

"Neither," said the King proudly. "I've brought you something you never saw before, I'll warrant. Look, it's a little wild girl."

"A what?" and the Princess Vanita waved all the jewelers aside with one hand, and held on to the latest crown with the other, as she leaned forward to look at Floria. And look at her she did—up and down and all around. And then she said, "Humph! take her away."

For you see the Princess Vanita was very vain and very proud, and she saw that Floria, wild or not, was much prettier than she, and she did not like that. She wanted nobody about who was good-looking at all, for she wished to be the most beautiful person herself. And so she turned her broad back full upon poor little Floria and would not look at her any more, or allow her to stay in the room.

"I don't want her. But if she's so precious, why don't you put her in the museum?" she cried over her fat shoulder.

"The very thing. My dear, you are always so wise," cried the little King, who was very eager to do everything he could to please such a fine, big woman as the Princess Vanita—a woman of really royal birth into the bargain. "Just the thing, Huford—to the museum."

But Huford, who meant to be kind, and was already sorry that he had brought poor Floria into such a lot of trouble, argued that if she were shut up in one of the glass cases she would very likely

die for want of air. And as the King saw that was true, he said peevishly, "Very well—the menagerie then. Anything to get her out of my sight. But don't let her go."

"No, your Majesty," said Huford. And he went off with Floria, while the fussy little King went up to his own room, where he took off his padded clothes, and people came who rubbed him and pummeled him and stretched him and did everything in their power to make him grow big and stout; and then he got dressed again, and went off to dine with the Princess Vanita, who had been having other people rubbing and pummeling and stretching her to make her grow slender and thin; and they were both so very busy looking in the mirrors to see whether all this rubbing and pummeling and so forth had done any good, that they quite forgot all about the little wild girl.

Which upon the whole, was just as well for Floria.

CHAPTER IX

THE WAY SHE MANAGED TO ESCAPE

A GREAT consultation there was around Floria's cage early the next morning. It had been too late to do anything the night before, and Floria had been too tired. After all, she was not uncomfortable. Huford had gone with her to the menagerie and had told the keepers there that she was under the direct protection of the King.

He had seen that she was given a very nice cage indeed, with a little place to sleep inside the menagerie, and a nice big cage outside, where she could walk about. There were bars, of course, front and back, and the monkeys on one side made an awful jabbering, and the lions on the other growled so that Floria was dreadfully afraid.

But Huford had done the best he could for her. He had brought a little mattress for her to lie upon, and a pretty silk rug for her to sleep under, and fruit and sandwiches and milk and a whole big box of chocolates. For the first time in days she did not need her magic basket.

"It's too bad, Midget," he said when he went away; "I'm sorry now. But we'll see you through all right, and no one shall hurt you. Sleep well; don't be frightened, and we'll try to get you out before long. The King may forget all about you pretty soon, and then it will be easy. Good-night," and he went away leaving Floria alone among the beasts.

They talked a great deal and wondered about her, and both the lions and the monkeys were angry, because she had a cage they had both wanted, to enlarge their quarters.

"They're not at all nice, like my friends," she thought. "But then it's enough to make anybody mean and cross to have to stay shut up here day after day. I don't believe I blame them very much."

And after eating the last chocolate caramel she could find, Floria lay down and slept as soundly as could be. She was getting so used to sleeping in odd places, that she did not mind them any more.

But in the morning when she awoke she felt that it was time to do something. She didn't know what the King or that horrid princess might do to her if they got a chance, and anyway she must hurry on her journey.

So as soon as the sun was fairly up, she put her silver whistle to her lips and blew as loud as ever she could. She had waited for the sun, because she wanted all her friends together, and knew that the Sun Fairy would be the most helpful one of all. Sure enough, as soon as the first note went out upon the quiet morning air, Floria caught sight of the misty little figure, that she never but once during her travels saw distinctly, hovering just within her prison bars, and in another moment it came nearer; she felt a soft, warm kiss upon her cheek, and the sweet voice whispered, "Courage, dear! We'll help you. You were a brave, good girl yesterday."

Then suddenly Floria heard far away the patter of many running feet. Nearer and nearer and nearer they came, till at last, there before her cage, was the whole pack of foxes, just as she had seen them in the forest, with Grandfather Fox and Loris at the head.

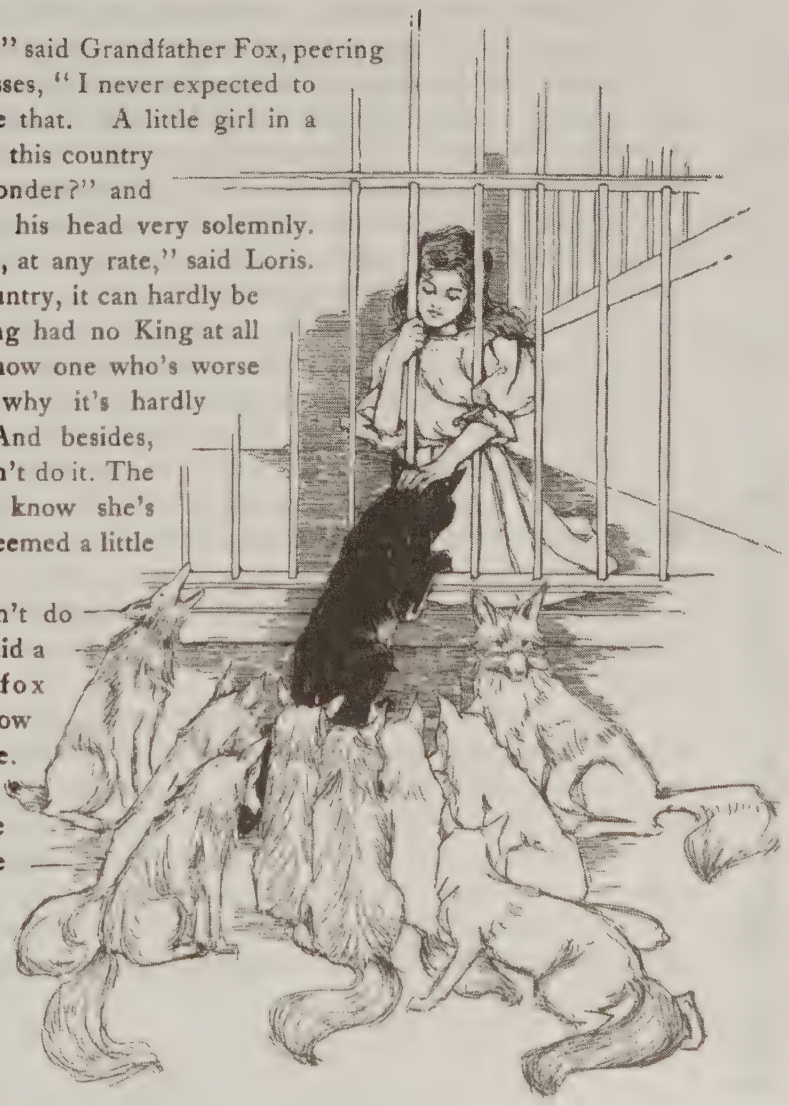
THE WAY SHE MANAGED TO ESCAPE

Loris leaped right up before the bars and stuck his head through for Floria to pet. The others sat down in a circle and stared up at her.

"Well, well," said Grandfather Fox, peering through his glasses, "I never expected to see a sight like that. A little girl in a cage! What is this country coming to, I wonder?" and then he shook his head very solemnly.

"She's here, at any rate," said Loris. "As for the country, it can hardly be blamed. Having had no King at all for years, and now one who's worse than nothing, why it's hardly accountable. And besides, the country didn't do it. The people hardly know she's here." Loris seemed a little angry.

"But it won't do to let them," said a sharp-faced fox nearby. "I know these people. They have changed since their own Prince left. They're hard-hearted and selfish and



vain, like their new rulers, and they won't treat her very well, or try to help her away either. She must get away to-day if possible."

Grandfather Fox nodded. "I'm sorry to say that you are right," he said. "The great question is—how?"

"Listen!" said the voice of the Sun Fairy, and they all looked up to where she swung in the air above them, like a great splash of sunshine. "Listen! I will bring my sisters, and ask my father's aid, and all day long we will rest on the bars of the cage till they are very soft so they will bend; and then at night, soon, very soon, so they can't harden again, you must come and bend them apart, and the little Princess may pass through."

"That's all very well," said the sharp-faced fox; "but we're none of us strong enough, even if the bars were very soft indeed."

"I have it," cried Loris. "Brother Bruin!"

"Sure enough," they all cried together; "Brother Bruin's the one—Brother Bruin!"

"Yes, yes; and what can I do for you?" said a big, good-natured voice. "Here I am. What now?" and there was Brother Bruin himself, rolling awkwardly along.

They set up a great clamor at sight of him, and he grinned pleasantly as he flopped down in the center of the circle and nodded to Floria.

"Great danger," he said. "Shouldn't have come—as the father of a family I should be more careful; but as a friend of the weak, I felt it my duty. Poor child! Caged you, have they? Hope I'll never get behind any bars. Now then, tell me all about it." And with much excitement, that was what they all proceeded to do.

When he understood, Brother Bruin scratched his head in perplexity and scowled. Then he cheered up and nodded.

"It's running myself into danger again," he cried; "and if I get caught, nobody's going to help me. But there, there, what's life without a little risk now and then? I'll do it." And they all set up such a cheering that the monkeys jabbered themselves hoarse with scolding, the lions roared with anger at having their morning naps so disturbed, and the keepers rushed out half dressed, sure that the beasts must be escaping or fighting—they couldn't guess which; but by the time they got there, they couldn't see a thing. The foxes had all run swiftly away; Brother Bruin had departed at his shambling trot, and everything was as usual except the monkeys and the lions, who seemed to be scolding at the little wild girl.

"It's very evident," the keepers said among themselves, "that she's not such friends with the beasts after all; but the people will want to see her."

And, sure enough, they did. Such a day poor Floria had never spent in all her life. In the first place, it was very warm, for the Sun Fairy was as good as her word. She and her sisters were shining down upon the bars of the cage with all their might. To Floria's eyes the whole air was full of glittering fairy shapes and bright with the flutter of their wings. She wondered other people did not see.

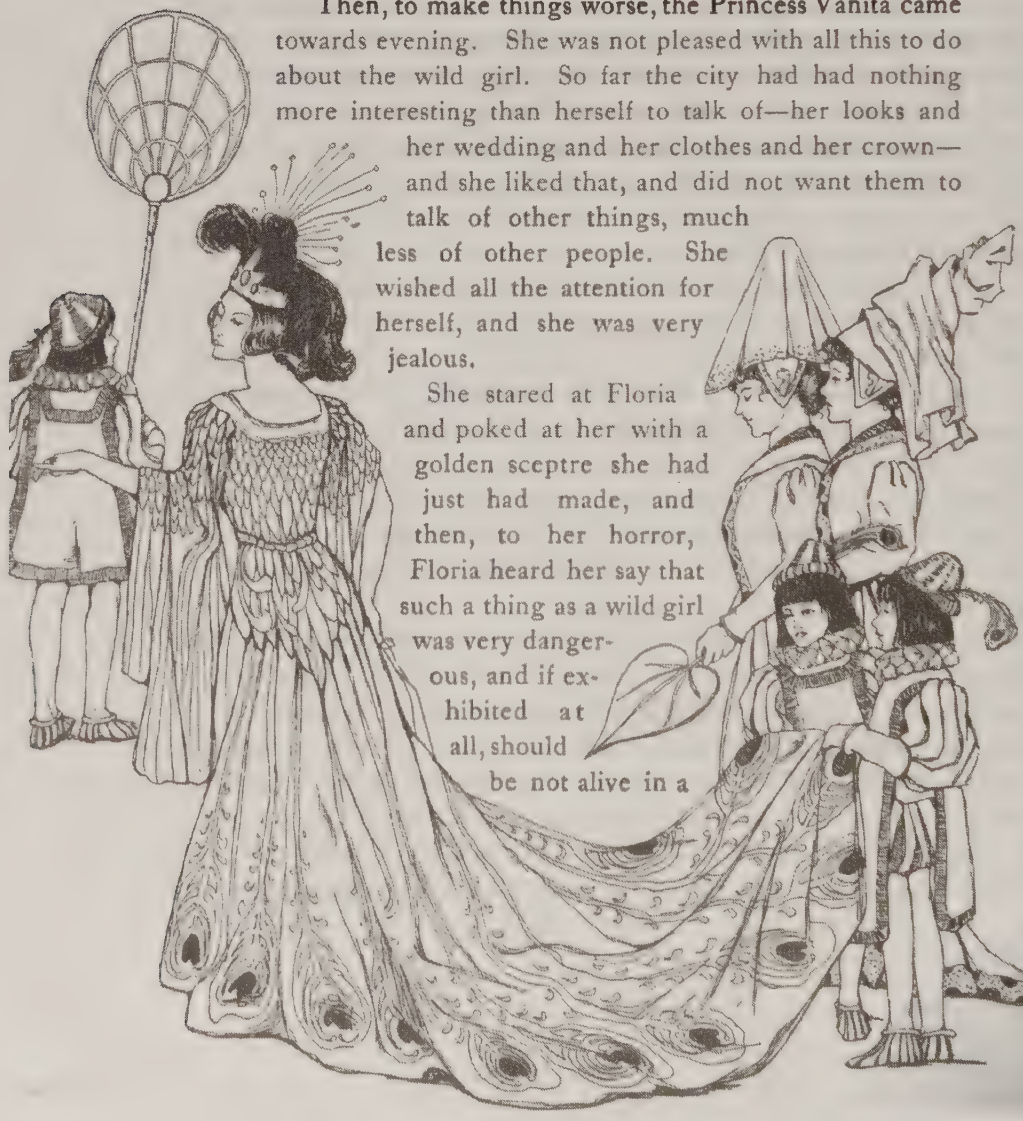
But though it was noticed that that was an especially warm day in the city, and warmer than ever by the wild girl's cage, people thought the special warmth right there was caused by the crowds. For the whole city came to see her. Old and young and rich and poor—they had all heard of the wild girl Huford had caught while she was riding on a bear, and they all came to see.

They were not kind to her either. It was as the fox had said. They thought only of their own naughty pleasure, and they threw

peanuts and pebbles at her to make her hop, and poked their fingers and umbrellas at her to see how she felt, and stared at her and talked about her, till the poor little Princess was almost sick with the horror of it all.

Then, to make things worse, the Princess Vanita came towards evening. She was not pleased with all this to do about the wild girl. So far the city had had nothing more interesting than herself to talk of—her looks and her wedding and her clothes and her crown—and she liked that, and did not want them to talk of other things, much less of other people. She wished all the attention for herself, and she was very jealous.

She stared at Floria and poked at her with a golden sceptre she had just had made, and then, to her horror, Floria heard her say that such a thing as a wild girl was very dangerous, and if exhibited at all, should be not alive in a



menagerie, but stuffed, in a glass case in the museum, as she had said at first.

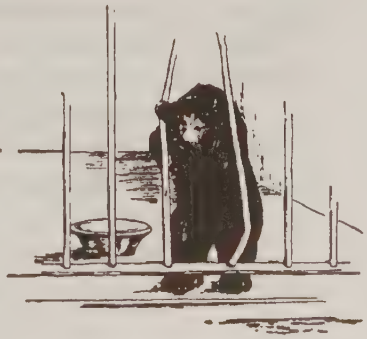
What a dreadful thing that was to say! Floria trembled and shrank back, and the Sun Fairy was so angry that she flashed into the Princess Vanita's selfish, hard little eyes and nearly blinded them for a moment, till the Princess cried: "Come, this heat and the crowd is too much. We'll leave her—and no one else shall stay. She's not fit to be seen. Turn out the people, and close the menagerie for the day. I must speak to the King before this exhibition goes on."

And the Princess Vanita signed to her pages to pick up her train, which was quite fourteen feet long, told her maids to gather up her sunshade and her fan and smelling salts, and sailed majestically away, after which the keepers put the people out and poor frightened Floria was left alone.

"She couldn't have helped us more, though; don't you see that, dear?" whispered the Sun Fairy gently. "Now Brother Bruin may come earlier. I'll see that he is called. And Loris will be waiting to help you away. Lie down now and rest," and the Sun Fairy slipped off, leaving Floria worn out, but happy, behind her.

The keepers told afterward how the sunbeams seemed to linger longer on the wild girl's cage that afternoon, and how they, coming to look after her, were blinded by the glare, so that they ran back for a moment into the house.

They ran back, and then when they came out—wonder of wonders!—the wild girl was gone! Yes, she was gone; but stranger still, in her place, caught between the heavy bars of her cage, was a great black bear!



CHAPTER X

FLORIA LEAVES HER FOREST FRIENDS

THAT was indeed the sad part of it all. The Princess Floria had escaped, but Brother Bruin had been caught. Big, kind-hearted Brother Bruin, so willing to help a friend, so slow in all his movements, that after he had come and put his great strong body between the softened bars and let Floria squeeze through, he had stupidly sat there watching her, instead of getting out himself, till the bars had hardened! Not much; but enough so that, strain as hard as he could, they would not bend an inch, and he was caught there.

Floria did not know it. As soon as she was free, Loris hurried her away through quiet streets out into the country; and before the astounded keepers had time to raise a hue and cry after her, she was safe in the depths of the forest, with a whole regiment of foxes to wait upon her, and the ever-helpful magic basket showering good things to eat and drink about her.

But then other foxes who had stayed behind to help Brother Bruin came in with the dreadful news.

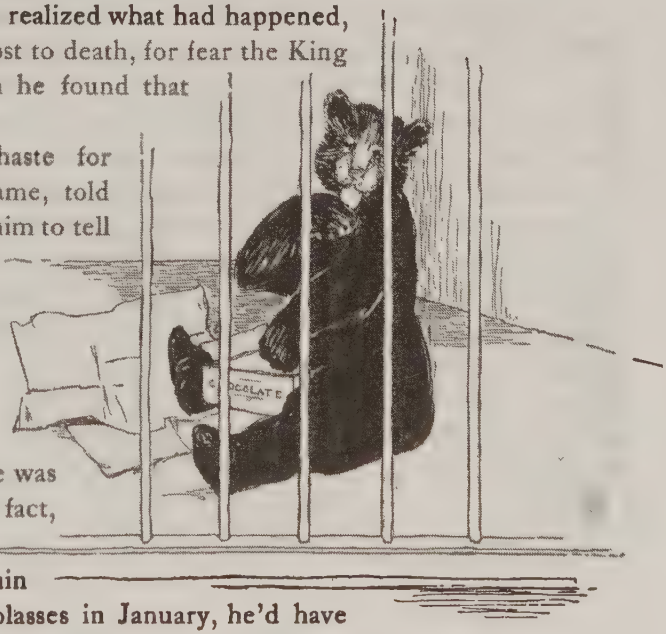
Loris tried to keep it from her, but Floria heard and wanted to go back instantly, and make them let him out and put her in his place. She started to run, but the foxes understood and stopped her.

Loris and the others said "No." They told her the people would take her again, indeed, but that they would not let Brother

Bruin go; so what would be the good? It would be two in prison instead of one.

Grandfather Fox told her that they would look after Mrs. Bruin and the children, and take messages from them to Brother Bruin, and see that they got plenty to eat.

Later in the night other foxes came in, who had seen Brother Bruin during the evening. They had great tales to tell. It seemed that as soon as the keepers realized what had happened, they were frightened almost to death, for fear the King would punish them when he found that Floria had escaped.



So they sent post haste for Huford, and when he came, told him the story, and asked him to tell the King it was not their fault.

Huford, the foxes said, had gone to the cage and made them take crowbars and pry Brother Bruin out; and he was ready to let him go. In fact, the sharp-faced fox said that if Brother Bruin hadn't been as slow as molasses in January, he'd have got off all right. But before he realized what Huford was doing, and that he might go, why the keepers set up a great cry and said they must have something to show the King; and if they hadn't a wild girl, it was almost as good to show the big bear who had set her free, and who was very likely the same

bear who had been with her in the forest when she herself was taken.

So Brother Bruin was put back into the cage, and had gone directly to Floria's bed and lain down upon it and pulled her silk blanket over him, determined to have as good a time as possible.

And the foxes said that when they saw him late at night, after the menagerie was all closed and everybody else asleep, he had found what was left of Floria's box of chocolates and was having a great time with them.

Poor Floria cried herself to sleep, and woke feeling sad and very weary.

Her journey seemed to stretch out and out before her, and it made her cry whenever she thought of good old Brother Bruin, shut up in that cage on her account. She remembered what he had said—"If I get caught, nobody's going to help me."

But Loris, who seemed to understand her wonderfully, said to her after breakfast: "Don't cry any more, little Princess. Be good and brave and you can help Brother Bruin yet. Just why, I can't tell you; but it is true that if you reach the end of your journey, find the Castle of Sulks, see Giant Grumpy Grouch, and get your temper back, you will at the same time help Brother Bruin. He will be let out the very next day after you do all this, and maybe sooner. Now I can't explain this to you; but you see there is something more for you to do."

Floria nodded and looked very grave. It seemed to her that there was a great deal depending upon her, and she felt very small and weak to do so much. There, in the first place, was her own temper to be won, her own home to be reached again, her own father comforted. There, in the second place, were the people of the Free Forest, all longing to be rid of the enchantment that

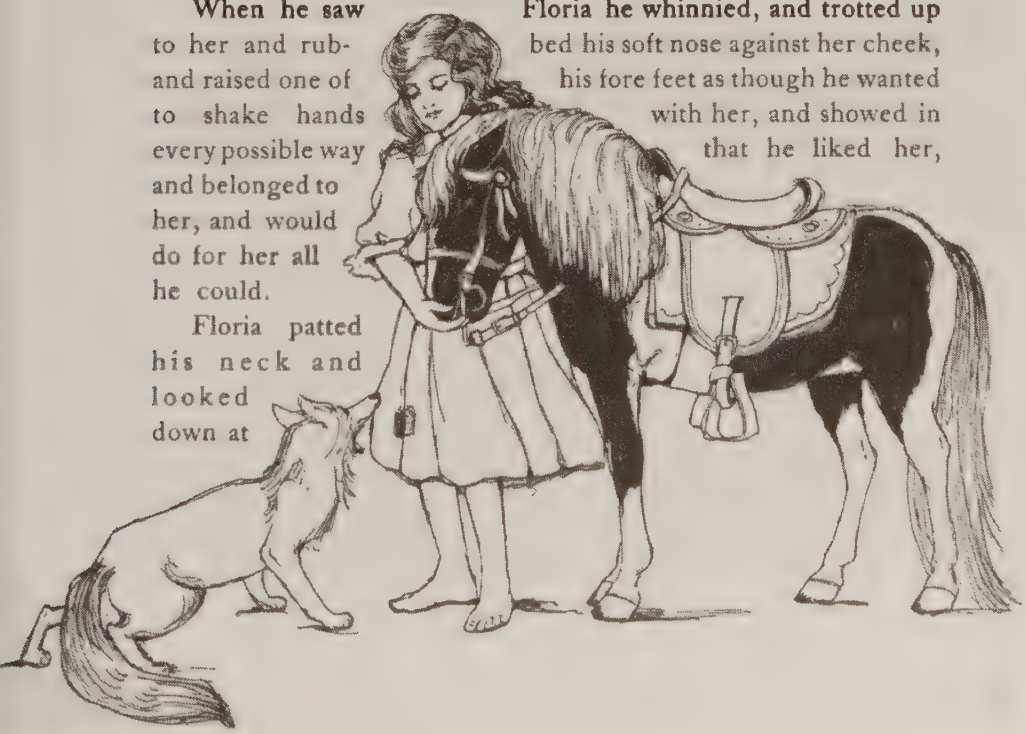
bound them into trees and flowers and rocks, and all looking to her for help. Then there, most of all, was the little lost Prince who must get his temper back, and his kingdom too. And now here was a third trust—dear, kind old Brother Bruin, who had got himself into trouble through helping her on her way to do all the other things.

But it comforted her to know that there was something she could do to help; and so she picked up her basket and prepared to start on, determined to do her very utmost to get to the end of her journey quickly.

It seemed that she was to be helped, too; for when she came to the edge of the forest, there stood a pretty, sturdy little pony, with a saddle on his back and a bundle strapped to the saddle.

When he saw Floria he whinnied, and trotted up to her and rubbed his soft nose against her cheek, and raised one of his fore feet as though he wanted to shake hands with her, and showed in every possible way that he liked her, and belonged to her, and would do for her all he could.

Floria patted his neck and looked down at



Loris to see whether he understood what it was all about. It seemed he did, for he was looking at her sadly.

"Floria," he said, "for reasons which I may not tell, I must leave you very soon. I cannot go beyond the boundaries of this kingdom—why, you may some time know. But though I cannot go with you myself, I had the power to see that a friend was still by your side. This is the friend. I have always called him Comrade. I have known him a long time, and am sure that he is kind and wise and will guard you well. If you will accept him, he will be allowed to speak to you."

Accept him! Floria fancied herself refusing. If she must give up Loris, what better than to have one of his friends for her own? Accept him! Of course she would. And going close to the pony, she threw her arms around his strong shaggy neck, and kissed the white star just between his eyes.

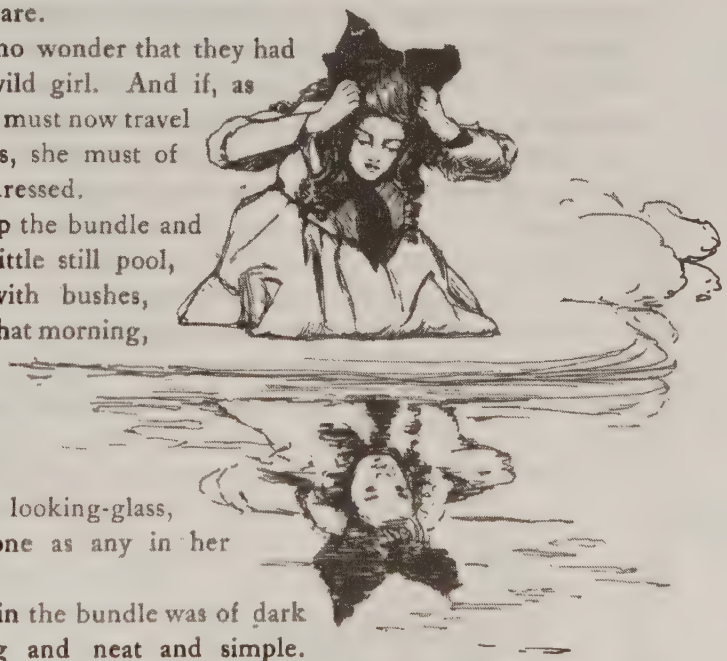
"Thank you," said Comrade, so suddenly that Floria jumped, and Loris, sad as he was, laughed at her. "I am glad that you are willing to trust yourself to me, Princess, and glad to serve both you and my master. Now, if you will open the pack upon my back, you will find some presents for you—presents you will need. You must put them on, for from this time forth for many days you cannot travel in the forest. We must go through villages and towns; there is no other way."

Floria, looking down at her clothes, blushed and understood. She was still in the poor old ragged dress that the witch had given her.

It had been bad enough the morning she first put it on; but that was long ago now, and she had worn it all the days of her travel through the forest, and the skirt hung in rags, one sleeve was torn quite out, the other had been ripped by briars till it

looked like nothing so much as fringe, and at her waist she had been forced to put a belt of braided grass.

Then she had no hat. Her bright, pretty hair was bleached still yellower by sun and wind, and the heavy old shoes had long ago been cast aside, so that her small feet, hard and brown by now, were quite bare.



Surely, it was no wonder that they had taken her for a wild girl. And if, as Comrade said, she must now travel through the towns, she must of course be better dressed.

So she took up the bundle and went back to a little still pool, hedged round with bushes, that she had seen that morning, and there she opened her bundle and changed her dress — the pool serving as a looking-glass, and as good a one as any in her father's palace.

The dress within the bundle was of dark blue cloth, strong and neat and simple.

There was a hat to match, and a cloak for cold or rainy weather, and shoes and stockings, and a ribbon for her hair.

A very different girl indeed looked into the pool, at the end of half an hour, from the one who had peeped in that morning.

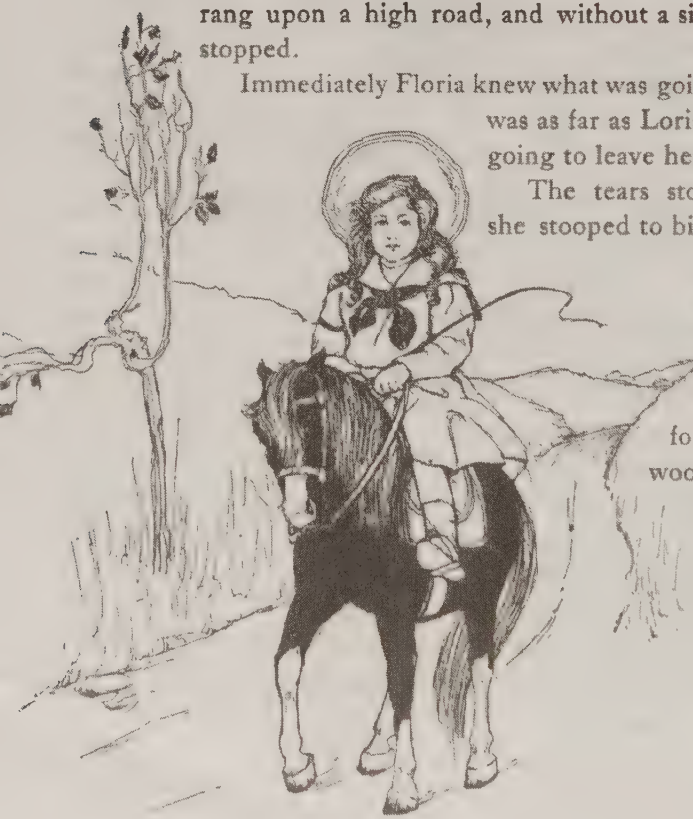
She did not look like the little Princess of long ago either, for she was so ruddy and so brown; but neither did she look like the

wild girl, with tousled flowing hair, ragged dress and bare brown feet.

Floria felt as if she were a different person altogether, and came out shyly when she was dressed.

But she soon felt herself again, when Loris told her how well she looked, and how the dress became her, and Comrade said that he should be proud to have her ride upon his back.

A very demure little maiden it was who clambered up in the saddle, raised the reins and trotted off through the fresh, clear morning. Loris ran lightly beside her, and a very pleasant company they were; but all of a sudden Comrade's little hoofs rang upon a high road, and without a signal from Floria he stopped.



Immediately Floria knew what was going to happen. This was as far as Loris could go. He was going to leave her.

The tears stood in her eyes as she stooped to bid him good-by. She thought of the night of the storm, when he had found her alone in the woods; of how he had taken her home with him; and afterward, of their long, happy days, traveling through the forest,

side by side, and the nights when she had slept with his soft fur as a pillow.

It seemed very hard that she must lose him now. Loris was unhappy too.

"Good-by, little Princess," he said softly. "Good-by. We've had pleasant hours together. You've always been good and brave and kind. Be so still and you cannot fail. And Floria, remember, if you win, you will surely see me again. That is all that I can tell you. Keep tight hold of the silver whistle and your magic basket, let Comrade help you all he can, and above every thing, remember—not one word must ever pass your lips, or all is lost. Good-by, dear little Princess. Good-by."

He leaped up, touched her hand with his soft pink tongue, and then, turning about, trotted rapidly away into the forest.

Floria and Comrade stood quite still, and watched him as long as he was in sight; but at last the tip of his bushy tail vanished beneath the bushes, and Comrade, without waiting for a signal, started on again down the great high road.

For the Princess Floria a new set of adventures had begun.

CHAPTER XI

BACK IN THE EVERYDAY WORLD AGAIN

AS Comrade's stout little hoofs clattered on along the great high road, Floria couldn't help thinking that this was a pleasant way to travel.

She missed Loris, and those days in the still green forest had been very beautiful days, but it was good to be back in the world of men and women and little children once more.

She passed a house where three or four babies rolled and tumbled on the grass, while their mothers sat upon the porch and gossiped, and Floria would have liked to get down and hug each little roly-poly figure tight. She did love babies so!

She saw boys and girls playing in the orchards or working in the gardens, and wanted to go to play or work with them, and though she knew she couldn't, it was good just to see all these things about her once more.

She passed farmers driving wagons, and they smiled and nodded at her, and Floria nodded happily back. She met some women driving carriages, and smiled at them too, till they said, "What a dear little girl that is!" and looked after her as far as they could see.

Comrade did not seem to know what it meant to grow tired. His strong little legs went on all morning, and Floria wasn't tired either, for she sat as comfortably in the saddle as in her own little rocking-chair, and enjoyed every minute of the time thoroughly.

BACK IN THE EVERYDAY WORLD AGAIN

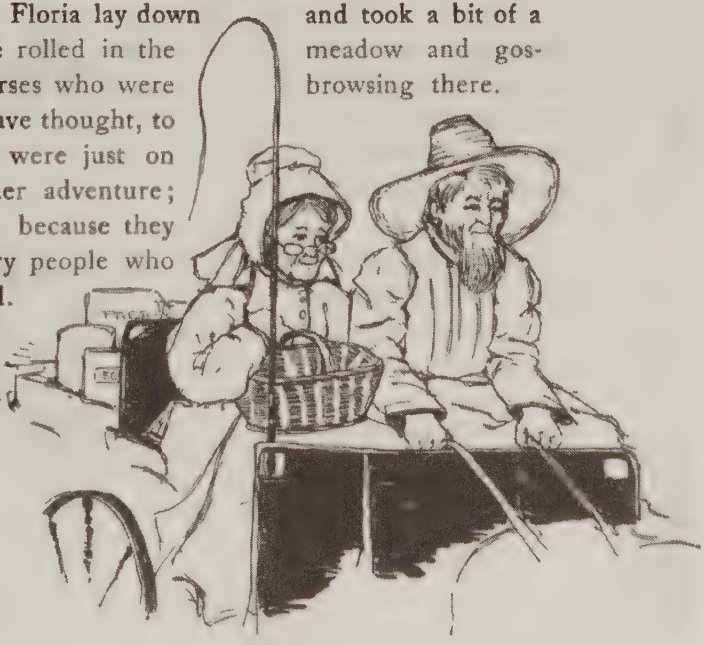
At noon, Comrade turned from the road to a great willow tree which stood beside a brook. It was an ideal place to stop and rest, and the Princess Floria, with a little gurgle of happy laughter, slipped to the ground, took off his saddle and bridle so he could rest, opened her magic basket, washed the dust from her face and hands in the brook, and then turned to see what the basket had furnished for lunch this time.

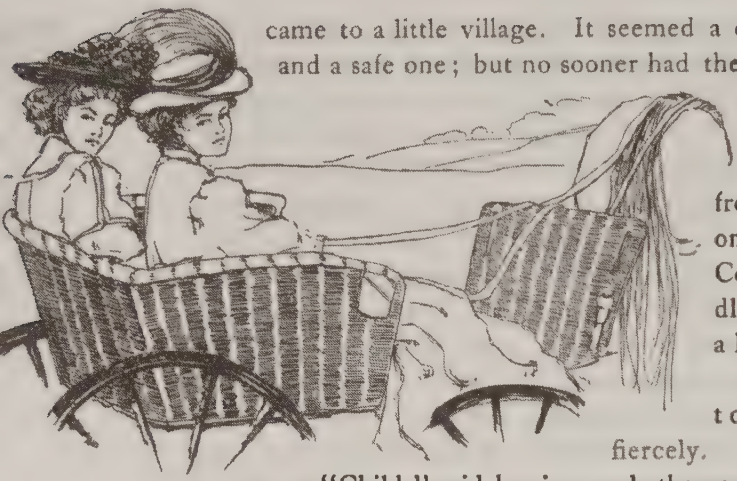
Chicken croquettes and crisp new bread, a pot of steaming chocolate, potato chips, gingerbread, and a pile of apples and lump sugar—neither she nor Comrade could have asked for better things. He stood beside her and ate apples and sugar, taking mouthfuls of fresh grass, or galloping off for a drink now and then, and they had the merriest sort of time.

Then, for a little, Floria lay down and took a bit of a nap, while Comrade rolled in the meadow and gossiped with some horses who were browsing there.

Nobody would have thought, to see them, that they were just on the brink of another adventure; but they were, just because they were among ordinary people who couldn't understand.

It came that afternoon. About three o'clock, when they were well on their way again, they





came to a little village. It seemed a quiet little village and a safe one; but no sooner had they started through the sleepy street, than a man rushed out in front of them all at once, and, seizing Comrade by the bridle, brought him to a halt.

Then he turned to Floria quite fiercely.

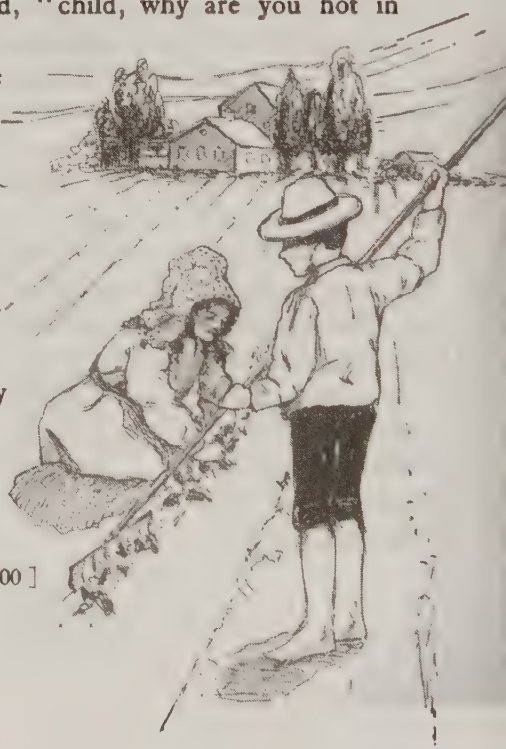
"Child," said he, in much the same pompous tone the funny little King had used, "child, why are you not in school?"

Floria was so astonished she could do nothing but sit and look at him. Faithful Comrade reared and tried to jerk his head away; but the man held tight.

"Child," he said again, "where are your manners? And where do you live?"

As usual, Floria could only shake her head.

"Stupid or stubborn," he said. "Come; I see it is my duty to look after you a bit;"



"She took Floria on her lap and asked her questions, and petted her, and kissed her."

and taking Comrade tightly by the reins, he led him into the yard of his house, lifted Floria down and carried her through into as pretty and as pleasant a room as she had ever seen, where a number of sweet-faced women were sitting, sewing and chatting together, while two pretty babies played upon the floor.

"Mercy me, what's this?" cried a big plump woman. "Who's the child, Aminadab?"

"I can't tell, Eliza," he answered; "I found her riding along the road all by herself. It is not right for so young a child to travel alone. I felt it my duty to stop and question her."

Oh, what a wise little path that had been, back in the Free Forest! Why had she had to take to the roads at all? Floria wondered.

"Poor little thing!" cried the woman, and she took Floria on her lap and asked her questions, and petted her and kissed her.

But though Floria liked all that well enough, she did not know what might happen next, and she felt that she was losing time.

"She must be lost," said the woman. "See, her clothes are very good, and how soft and fine her hair and skin are; and what tiny hands and feet! She is lost. Someone will be coming along to claim her, and we must wait. We'll keep her here."

"She must go to school—she must go to school in the morning," said the man decidedly. "You can't be better to a child than to give it a first-class education."

"But why doesn't she say something?" asked one of the women. "Why doesn't she tell things herself?"

The truth was that everybody else had been talking so much since Floria had been brought in, that she couldn't have set a word in edgewise if she had wished. But now the man remembered she had said nothing to him, and the women found that she would say nothing to them either, and there was a great excitement.

"She's stupid," said one.

"She's deaf and dumb," said another.

"No, no; she comes from a foreign country and cannot understand us," said a third. And as Floria did not look stupid or seem deaf, they thought that woman must be right, and said she was very clever indeed to have thought of it.

So they petted Floria all the more, and examined her clothes and looked in the magic basket, which obligingly showed them a neat little brush and comb, a nightie and a pair of slippers—just what any well-regulated little girl would take with her upon a short journey.

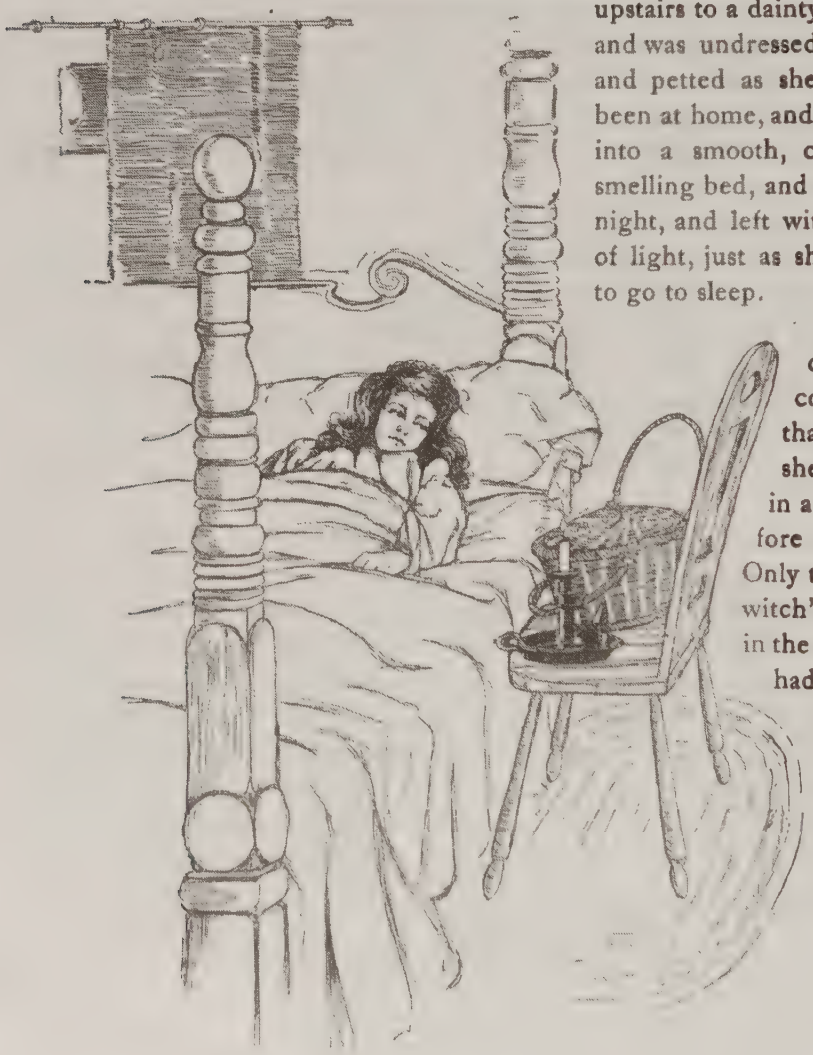
Then they all went out and admired Comrade and patted him and fed him sugar, till Floria, remembering all he had had at lunch, was quite certain he would be sick, and then he was led away and put in a stall in the barn, and they took Floria back into the house and gave her a delightful supper, and that evening Floria felt almost as if she was back in the menagerie again.

For the news of her coming had spread all over this quiet little village, as it had spread through the city, and everybody came to see her.

But now they were all kindly and nice. They asked her questions and wondered at her silence.

They imagined all sorts of things about her—some of them so ridiculous that Floria nearly laughed in their faces, and they said they'd be sure to find out everything to-morrow, when Miss Work saw her. Floria began to be quite afraid of Miss Work, till she discovered from their talk that she was only the school-teacher—not a dreadful person at all, and that she was expected to find everything out, because she knew a great many languages, and they thought that she would certainly be able to talk to Floria and make her understand.

Such an exciting evening as it was! But it was soon over, for Floria's hosts said she ought to go to bed. She must be tired. So everyone said "good-night" very loud, as though they could make her understand by shouting, and then she was led away upstairs to a dainty little room, and was undressed and washed and petted as she had always been at home, and then tucked into a smooth, clean, sweet-smelling bed, and kissed good-night, and left with a wee bit of light, just as she liked best to go to sleep.



It was delicious—Floria couldn't deny that. Just think, she hadn't slept in a real bed before for weeks! Only twice—at the witch's house and in the menagerie—had she even had a mattress. Poor Floria hardly knew whether to laugh or cry.

She remembered hearing something about being "killed by kindness," and she thought that was what was happening to her.

It was lovely; but she ought to be on her way to the Castle of Sulks! Maybe she could climb out of the window, let Comrade out and be far away by the time the good people woke in the morning.

It would be ungrateful, for they meant so well; but some day she could come back and explain everything and thank them.

Yes, that was a good plan. And so, though she was very sleepy and the bed was very sweet and soft, she rolled about and pinched herself and stared at the light hard, and so managed to keep awake till the house was dark and quiet.

Then carefully, slowly, she put out one foot, then the other. Quietly, quietly, she tiptoed towards the door to shut it.

But at the second step a voice cried out, "Who's there?" and Floria flew back between the sheets, just as a funny night-capped head poked in at the door, and a voice said, "All's right here. You dreamed you heard a noise, Eliza. Go to sleep. I'll sit up a bit and listen to see whether the child wants anything."

Floria sighed. There was no use trying to get away that night; and then suddenly a notion popped into her head.

The magic moss! She had forgotten all about it, but remembered seeing it when the women were turning over the things in her basket.

What was it the moss bank had told her? "Sometimes when you are in great perplexity or discouraged, it will show you what you ought to do, in your sleep, if your head is lying on it."

Floria had never needed it before; but she did now, with Loris far away, Comrade shut up in the stable, and the Sun Fairy off for the night.

The basket was on a chair beside her. She put out her arm, lifted the cover, felt about inside, and, sure enough, in a moment her fingers had touched the little dried bit of moss. She drew it out, put it under her pillow, and in five minutes was sound asleep.

But when she woke and rubbed her blue eyes wide apart, she was still a sadly perplexed little Princess.

"I don't see what it means," she thought; "I don't call that a very wise dream. It seems to me like nonsense."

For, mingled with the pleasantest of dreams, in which she seemed to be back in the Free Forest, playing with Skip and Jumper, she had heard over and over again, first in the deep, rough tones of Brother Rock, then in the softer ones of the moss bank, the queer little rhyme:

"Brightly, brightly the fire burns red—
Claim by its shadow your food and bed."

"What fire?" thought the Princess Floria, "and where is it burning, and who does it belong to, and how can I claim anything when I can't say a word? That's nonsense." And, feeling rather disheartened, she got up and began to dress herself; but before she left the room, she picked up the magic basket and hung it on her arm. "After all," she thought, "there may be something in that dream. I may see a fire somewhere, and if I do I'll go to it right away and see what happens; and no matter what comes, I mustn't be separated from my basket. Now I'll go down to breakfast. I do hope there'll be pancakes. The fairies never seem to think of those."

The Princess Floria went out of her pretty room, little thinking that it would be a long, long time before she saw it again.

CHAPTER XII

WHERE THE FIRE BURNED RED

THEY did have pancakes for breakfast—nice, crisp, brown ones—and the Princess Floria remembered them forever, as she remembered the pleasant house, and her pretty room, and the kindly people.

For as it was the first time in many months that she had lived as she had been used to live at home, so it was a long time before she lived that way again.

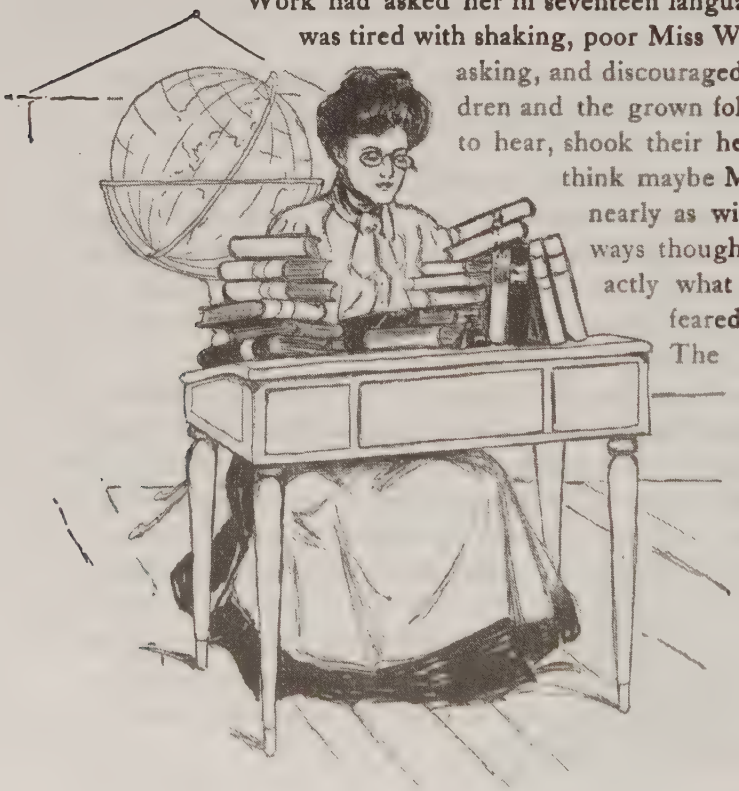
After breakfast, the man of the house insisted upon taking her straight away to school, and so they all three went, though Floria hung back and begged them to let her take Comrade, till the man brought him out, all saddled, and Floria mounted him and felt better. Now, if anything should happen, why, she had Comrade and the magic basket, and was ready.

The schoolhouse was as trim and neat as a school should be, and Floria, who, because she was a Princess, had always had to study alone, thought what fun it must be to have a lot of boys and girls to say lessons with—as long as lessons had to be said at all—and made up her mind then and there that when she got big and had little girls and boys of her own, they should go to school like other children.

But it was very little those children learned that morning, for they were all looking at the Princess Floria and wondering about her. As for their teacher, the Miss Work of whom Floria had

heard so much, she was dreadfully excited. She felt that her reputation hung on making Floria understand her in some kind of language, and so she had sat up half the night studying a bit out of this kind of grammar and a bit out of that. And then in the morning she had gotten up early, polished her glasses, and done it all over again.

So now she sat, with a perfect wall of grammars about her, and when the Princess Floria came in, she just began, without any "good morning" or anything, to say "Who are you?" in all sorts of languages. At the first Floria shook her head—at the second—at the third—at the fourth; and by the time Miss Work had asked her in seventeen languages, Floria's head was tired with shaking, poor Miss Work was tired with asking, and discouraged too, and the children and the grown folks who had come to hear, shook their heads and began to think maybe Miss Work was not nearly as wise as they had always thought, which was exactly what Miss Work had feared might happen. The tears rose in her eyes, behind her shiny glasses, and Floria, seeing them, understood and was so sorry.



Then suddenly an idea came to her, and she

thought how very, very foolish she had been not to think of it before.

She could not talk, to be sure; but there had been nothing said about writing.

Quick as a flash she stepped forward, took a pencil, and wrote in the neatest little hand you ever saw; "You must not feel badly. It is not that I do not understand. I cannot talk. You have all been very kind to me and I thank you; but I cannot tell you any more about myself." Then, looking up into poor Miss Work's anxious eyes, she added: "I think your teacher is the wisest woman that I ever met. I have been in many countries, but I never saw anybody who knew more languages." Then she handed the paper to the people, and they read it and passed it about, and "Ohed" and "Ahed" about it, and looked more wonderingly than ever at the Princess, and poor Miss Work flushed with pleasure when she read it and gave Floria a quick little kiss.

But the other people raised a great commotion and drew into a group, and seemed to have a great deal to say to each other.

After a little they came over and took Floria gravely by the hand, and patted her shoulder, and said: "There, there," as though she were sick, and the woman who had kept her all night began to cry and said: "Poor little thing! I don't care what's wrong, I shall adopt her and be a mother to her."

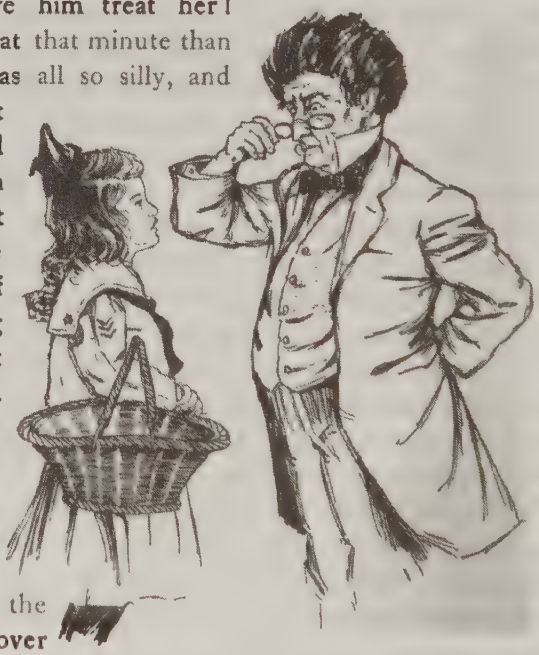
That sounded kindly, but suspicious, and Floria was worried; for what did they do but take her out, bundle her into a buggy with shawls and pillows, gave her a spoonful of something that tasted very badly, and then drove her away towards a city she could see in the distance.

Floria's only comfort was that she saw Comrade trotting on behind; his ears cocked to catch everything that was said; his bright,

quick eyes glancing from side to side in search, as Floria knew, of a chance to escape.

She couldn't imagine, though, what they meant to do with her; but she found out presently. For they took her to a big building and up in an elevator, and into an office, and there was a big, bushy-haired doctor, and they told him—what do you think? They told him there was something wrong with Floria—that she couldn't talk, and they had come to have him treat her!

Floria came nearer speaking at that minute than she had for a long time. It was all so silly, and yet so well meant, that she felt desperate. No wonder she had been warned to keep away from ordinary people. They didn't understand things a bit, and she was quite sure now that even if she explained the whole thing they wouldn't believe her, but would look graver than ever and have her treated by two doctors maybe instead of one.



This one was bad enough. He made Floria stick out her tongue and wiggle it all about, which she did not mind doing in the least, and he thumped her all over and looked into her eyes, and then he said there was something very wrong with her indeed, and that she could not even go home with her friends—that he would take her to his hospital, and watch her closely; her case needed careful treatment and study.

All that when there wasn't a thing wrong! The Princess Floria grabbed a pencil from somebody and scribbled on the doctor's own pad, right over the notes of her case: "There's nothing the matter with me—there isn't, there isn't, there isn't;" and then suddenly, while they all bent solemnly over to see what she had written, she took her magic basket, ran out of the room, bounced into an elevator that was just going down, shot to the bottom floor before anyone could stop her, ran into the street, and in another second was on Comrade's back, galloping through the city streets at a great rate, while the doctor leaned from his window and bawled out for somebody to stop her, so hard that his wig fell off and floated right down over the eyes of the man who had brought Floria there and made him stumble, and by the time he had got started again, Floria was nearly out of sight.

"I know where we'll go," Comrade was saying as he ran. "We can't stay among ordinary folks at all—we proved that; and yet, sad to say, Giant Grumpy Grouch has built his castle right where there are the most people, because amongst them he gets so many tempers.

We can't keep to the forests any more; but there is a plan, and I know

how to carry it out. There are people we can travel with, and no questions asked, and we're going to them as fast as ever we can. Anybody following?" Floria looked, but there was no one behind. She longed to ask where they were going and who these people were with whom it would be safe to travel. She was dreadfully curious, and she very soon found out.

For before long, Comrade leaped lightly over a fence into a field sheltered with rows of heavy bushes. The school and the doctor and all had taken up most of the day, so that now it was nearly dark, and Floria saw, shining against the background of a bit of woods, the dancing red glow of a camp fire.

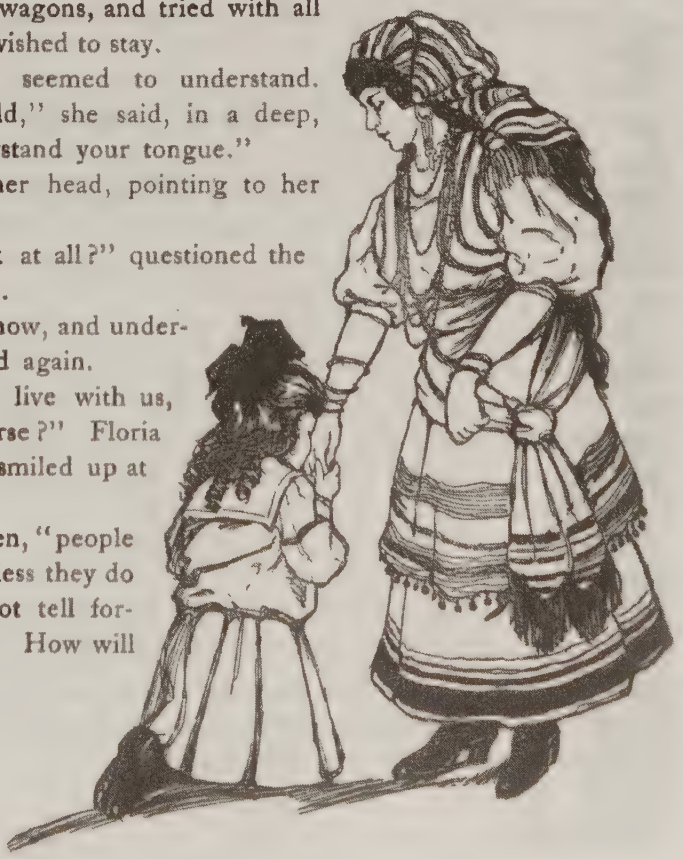
"Brightly, brightly the fire burns red—
Claim by its shadow your food and bed."

The silly little rhyme of the dream flashed into her head at once. Here was the fire. Who were the people with whom she was to stay?

Then, all of a sudden, she understood—Gypsies! Of course they were Gypsies. Comrade had trotted up close to the fire now, and putting down his nose, whinnied. An old woman who had been tending the fire looked and called out something in a language Floria did not understand, and suddenly people seemed to pop up everywhere. They came out of little round tents, out of big square tents, out of gay-painted wagons, and from old worn ones; for Comrade had carried Floria right to the heart of a Gypsy camp.

Curious, frightened, amused, Floria sat and watched them as they were watching her, when Comrade whispered: "Quick—that woman coming from that biggest wagon is the Queen. Go over and kiss her hand, and try to make her understand you want to stay with her."

Floria was not sure she did want to stay; but Loris had told her to obey Comrade's advice. This was surely where "the fire burned red," and then, just as she was hesitating a bit, the last rays of the setting sun fell through an opening in the trees, and for a moment she thought she saw the Sun Fairy, who seemed to have deserted her lately, perched on the head of the Gypsy Queen, beckoning; only a moment and the bright shape was gone, but it was enough. Floria slipped from her saddle, and, running across the space between them, threw herself on her knees beside the beautiful black-eyed woman, kissed her hand, motioned to herself and Comrade and the wagons, and tried with all her might to show she wished to stay.



The Gypsy Queen seemed to understand. "You may speak, child," she said, in a deep, rich voice; "we understand your tongue."

But Floria shook her head, pointing to her mouth.

"You do not speak at all?" questioned the Queen. Floria nodded.

"But you hear me now, and understand?" Floria nodded again.

"And you wish to live with us, you and your little horse?" Floria nodded very hard, and smiled up at her.

"But," said the Queen, "people may not stay with us unless they do something. You cannot tell fortunes, you cannot beg. How will you get money?"

Quick as a wink, Comrade came trotting over beside them. And what on earth was he doing? Floria had never seen him act so before.

He bowed and shook his mane and bowed again. He got up on his hind legs and danced. He lay down and rolled over and over. He picked up a bell that lay upon the ground, and rang it with his teeth. He stuck his hind legs in the air, and walked on his front ones, and then he wound up the performance by jumping over the very fire, never scattering an ember or getting burned himself.

The Gypsy boys cheered and cheered, and the wild, dark-eyed Gypsy men went up to Comrade and patted him and ran their hands over his firm little body and nodded to each other, and the girls and women crowded close, all looking at the Queen.

The Queen nodded. "A trick pony," she said. "He will bring in money, sure enough. Yes, little girl, you may stay," and turning, she called out, "Zelma, Zelma!"

Somebody moved inside the big, gay wagon from which the Queen had come, and a little girl peeped out—a girl as different from Floria as could be—about her size and age, but very dark, with rich black hair, and big, deep, black eyes and a clear dark skin—a beautiful girl, and with a bright, kind face, too. "Zelma," called the Queen, "come here."

The little girl climbed down from the wagon and walked lightly over to the fire.

"Here," said the Queen, "is a new playmate for you. Be kind to her. She is to live with us. I do not think she knows our ways. Show her. She can hear and understand you, but she cannot talk," and the Gypsy Queen went over to look at Comrade herself, leaving the little girls alone together.

They stood looking at each other for a moment, and then they both smiled.

"I like you," said Zelma. "What is your name?"

Floria shook her head.

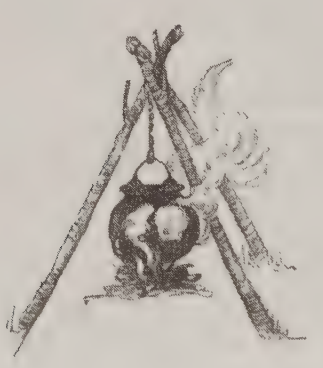
"Oh, you can't speak! I'm sorry. Well, see here, I'll name you myself. You're so pretty, it ought not to be hard. You look just like a flower—a posey—there, I've got it—Posey! That's what we'll call you," and Zelma jumped up and clapped her hands.

But all of a sudden Floria heard voices on the road. It must be—it was—people coming after her! She ran to the Queen, took her hand, pointed, and the Queen understood.

She called out something in the strange new language, and two boys took Comrade by the mane and ran back into the woods with him. Then she took Floria, and gave her to one of the soft-eyed women. "There is room in your tent for her," she said; "hide her there;" and the woman led Floria away to a little round tent, which had the flap pinned open like a door. It was rather stuffy inside, and there was a big pile of bedding and blankets there that looked hot and uncomfortable. The woman led the Princess Floria over right behind the pile, however, and made her lie down there, with her head on some carriage cushions, and then she herself went out again, and Floria could hear now that the people from the town had come. She could hear their voices asking whether the Gypsies had seen a little fair-haired girl mounted on a spotted pony, going that way. And when the Queen asked them whether she was the daughter of anybody there, Floria heard them say "No," and tell how they had found her, and what they were going to do with her, and then the Queen said: "I am sorry I cannot help you. You must go on."

"She's here, I know she's here," cried one of the men. "They're trying to hide her; let's search the tents."

Search the tents! Floria was frightened. Suppose they found her and took her back, when could she ever get away to start on her journey again? She heard them coming, nearer and nearer, and then, of a sudden, Floria did a very dreadful thing—she sneezed.



CHAPTER XIII

AMONG THE GYPSIES

IF Floria could have been outside the tent when that sneeze was heard, she would have laughed. She couldn't have helped it. Being inside, she lay and trembled, seeing the hospital of that old doctor looming up before her.

No sooner did the people from the village hear that "a-a-ker-cho" than they pricked up their ears, sharpened up their eyes and stared at the tent, where, sure enough, Floria lay hidden.

"She is there—I know it," cried Mr. Aminadab fiercely; "I go," and go he did, stalking over to the tent as fast as his long legs would take him, while Zelma ran and hid in her mother's wagon, frightened lest her new playmate should be caught and taken from her.

But before Mr. Aminadab, long-legged as he was, could get into the tent, the Gypsy woman who owned it was there, standing in the door and beckoning to him in as friendly a way as possible.

"Yes, a sneeze," she said gaily, "a little sneeze, and see—what from." Leaning down above the pile of bedding, she tossed a blanket over a little in an accidental sort of way. The blanket fell straight upon Floria, hiding her completely from Mr. Aminadab's sharp eyes, though he stood not three feet away, and from beneath it the gypsy woman took—what do you suppose? A baby! How it could have lain there all covered up so long without smothering, Floria couldn't imagine; but Gypsy children could

stand amazing things, as she found out during the next few days. At any rate, there was the baby, smiling and crowing and waving its tiny pink fists in the air, quite as though it understood the joke and wanted to join in, which it really did, by sneezing all its own self in the most accommodating way.

"There," cried the Gypsy woman, "there, you see?"

Mr. Aminadab saw. He chucked the baby under the chin and turned away. "I'm afraid we've really lost her," he said, in such a sad sort of voice that Floria nearly jumped up and went to him. He meant so well, and he was doing so very badly!

But she comforted herself with the thought that when it was all over she could come back and tell them everything—if they would believe it. Floria made up her mind that she had better not be alone when she told her story to such very practical people, or they would send her off to another doctor.

Slowly she lifted the hot, heavy blanket; carefully she peeped out, and there at the door was Zelma, and far away on the road were the voices of Mr. Aminadab and the others. "Come out, come out—all safe," whispered Zelma. And in another moment the two girls were doing a wild dance around the camp fire.

"Now," cried Zelma, when they had quieted down a little, "I've teased and teased till mother says you may sleep with us. It's not usual, you know, for my mother is the Queen," and Zelma

drew herself up proudly; "but you may come," and she led the way into the big wagon.

It was very gaily painted outside, and the Princess was surprised to see how comfortable it was within.

There were little windows, with glass in them, and white curtains. At one end was built in a table; racks filled with all sorts of things were upon the wall, and underneath them were long upholstered seats, that turned into beds at night, having pillows and blankets stored below them. It was a regular little house on wheels, and Floria was as pleased with it as could be, and examined everything with such delight that Zelma liked her more than ever. "We're going to be such friends," she cried. "I only wish you could talk. But I'm glad you can hear anyway, and mother says I talk enough for two. Come on out; they're cooking supper."

It was a wild but pretty sight that Floria saw. There was a large camp of Gypsies, three bands having met there; so many fires were lighted, and over all of them were pots and kettles, sending out little puffs of steam, while the women stirred them, and moved here and there, outlined, like witches, against the crimson light.

By the Queen's tent stood the tiniest, most complete stove Floria had ever seen. It might almost have come out of her doll's house, and yet it had grown-up pots and pans upon it now.

"It's little," Zelma explained, "because in rainy weather or when it is cold we cook inside the wagon. We carry the stove under the table inside, and the cooking things there," and she pointed to a box beneath the wagon.

Floria nodded and smiled. She was learning things fast.

They ate supper picnic style, outside under the stars, and then Zelma took her over to the group about a camp fire, where they

were telling stories, and some boys were dancing, and one of the old Gypsy women came up, holding out her hand and crying, "Your fortune, little stranger lady. Let Anita tell your fortune."

But as she held the Princess Floria's hand in hers, she glanced up sharply, and then, bending lower, looked again. Then she turned and talked very rapidly to Zelma.

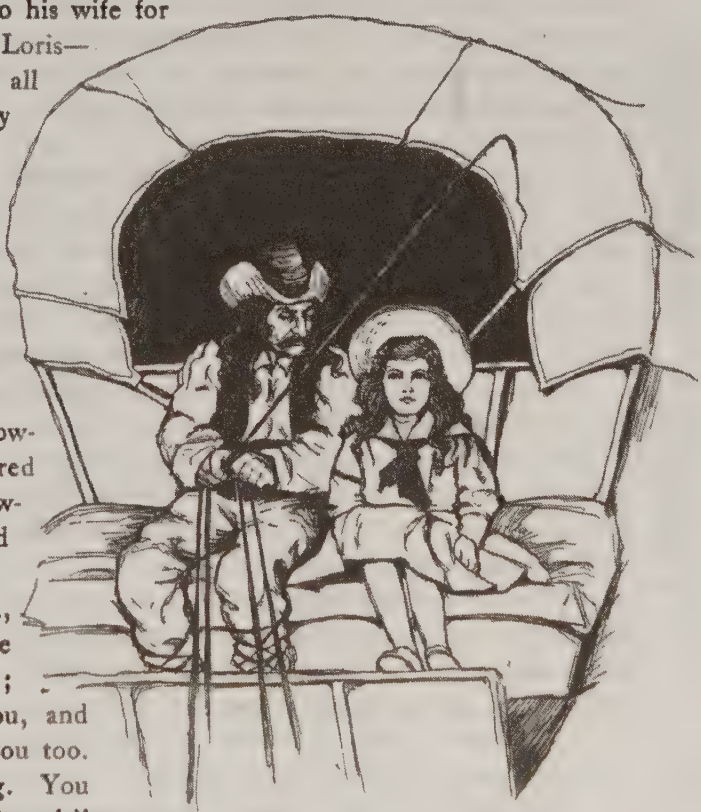
"She says," said Zelma, wonderingly, "she says that you are not what you seem. That you are a Princess, and will rule some day over a large country. She says you are under a fairy spell, and are being punished for something, though you are not really bad—you couldn't be that! and she says the fairies have sent you to us, and we must help you all we can. Is it true?"

Floria nodded. How could the old woman tell all that, just by looking at her hand? No wonder the Sun Fairy had told her to travel with these people. They understood things as ordinary folks evidently did not. She was glad that the people in her father's kingdom were not as practical as those with whom she had been staying. "Why, then," cried Zelma, "you are the Princess Posey! Of course you should stay with us. It is right you should. My mother is a queen, too," and Zelma evidently thought her mother was quite as great a person as Floria's father could be; and so she really was. Floria found it made a great difference when the bands found out she was a Princess. They all waited upon her, as people had done at home, and were very respectful to her, and poor little Floria was very happy and enjoyed the wild, free life, every minute of it.

The day after she joined the Gypsies, the three bands separated again, and the Queen's own band, with which Floria was to travel, went west, the way that Floria was going. Floria saw the Sun Fairy now and then, and had long talks with her.

"She says that you are not what you seem—that you are a Princess."

She heard of Brother Bruin—how he was still in his cage sleeping, and eating all sorts of things, and not having a bad time on the whole, as the foxes saw his children were fed and cared for, and took messages to his wife for him. She heard of Loris—how he was spending all his time at the very edge of that kingdom beyond which he could not go, waiting for her to come back again. The Sun Fairy even told her of the people in the Free Forest, and how they were growing more and more tired of being trees and flowers and rocks and beasts.



"You helped them, Princess Floria," the Sun Fairy would say; "they remember you, and they're waiting for you too. It won't be very long. You are near your journey's end."

Comrade, too, seemed to enjoy himself. He carried Floria on his back when they were traveling, or sometimes Zelma, when Floria would climb to the front seat on the big gay house wagon.

He frolicked with the other horses, and whenever they came to towns or villages, he went with Floria and did the most astonishing tricks, after which he would take à tin cup, pass it around and get pennies. He got a great many, too, and Floria made the Gypsies take them all. She did not need any money, she knew. When she wanted anything, why it was in her magic basket, and when her journey was over and she was home again, she would not need it either.

So Floria and Comrade were very welcome people in the Gypsy band. The magic basket held good things for Comrade, too, and sometimes the little Princess would creep out to him at night, or in the early morning, and hold it while he ate his oats, and then he would talk to her and tell her things that he heard from the other horses, and from the Gypsies and from the fairies too.

And so at last he told her that they were indeed getting near to the great grim Castle of Sulks.

The Princess Floria had been with the Gypsies three or four weeks then. She had slept in the house wagon, or out under the sky, with Zelma. She had eaten from the funny little stove, and from the cooking fires of the others, too. Sad to say, she had learned to eat with her fingers, as many of the Gypsy children did. And, too, she had learned the Gypsy dances, and had their songs all stored up in her head to sing when she could, and she had learned to like them more and more every day.

For a moment she was almost sorry to think that she would have to leave them soon.

"The Castle of Sulks," said Comrade, munching his oats as he talked, "is about a week's journey from here; but the Gypsies will not go much nearer. They know it is there, and they are afraid. Ordinary people, who don't believe in fairy things, don't

know, or pretend they don't, and go very near, and then old Giant Grumpy Grouch swoops down and carries their tempers off, and that is the end of their happy days. Nobody likes them after that, and they are hard, fault-finding men, and scolding, ill-tempered women, who really can't help being what they are. It is very sad. But the Gypsies understand and keep away; and they could not help you in any case. So be ready, little Princess, to leave them when the Sun Fairy gives us the signal. We must go on alone. The Gypsies will not stop us. They know we travel under fairy orders. Good-night!"

And Floria, creeping back, lay down by Zelma, and cuddled close. She was excited and glad her journey was nearly done, but did not like to lose her friend. She had made so many friends since she started, and she had had to leave them all.

The signal came one morning, two or three days later. At night, when the band stopped, they pitched their tents and settled their wagons as if for a long stay. Floria looked inquiringly at Zelma, and Zelma nodded. "We'll stay here for a good while," she said; "there are big cities all around here, full of people—ordinary people such as you met before—people who never believe in fairies. We don't want to get too close, for we Gypsy folk don't like the cities, so we will camp here, and go to them to tell fortunes; for even ordinary people really like fairy things, you see, though they pretend they don't, and so they pay for fortunes. You'll see, Princess Posey."

But Floria shook her head. She was quite sure that here was where she must begin her journey all alone.

And sure enough, it was so. Early in the morning the Sun Fairy woke her. "Come, little Princess," she cried, "take your magic basket and go. Comrade is waiting." Floria, sad and

happy and frightened—all three—jumped up and into her clothes. There, sure enough, was Comrade, standing saddled and bridled by the wagon, though who had made him ready Floria could not imagine.

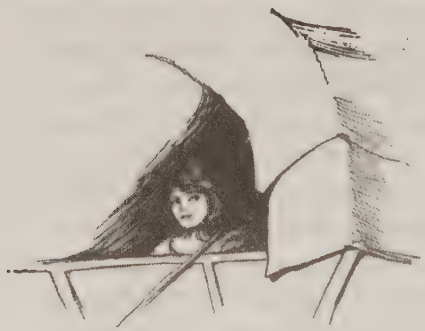
The Gypsies were beginning to stir, and Princess Floria, leaning over Zelma, kissed her. Zelma jumped up and understood at once.

"Oh," she cried, "must you go?" Floria nodded, and they both cried a little. Then Floria went out, mounted Comrade, and, with the Sun Fairy to guide her, rode away alone upon her journey, while the Gypsies stood silent looking after her.

All but old Anita. She ran with them, faster than Floria could have thought possible, and came up beside Comrade.

"Here," she cried. And taking a little brown bird from the bosom of her dress, she threw it up into the air. Straight up and up it flew, then settled slowly down and lit on Floria's shoulder.

"You will need it," cried the old woman. "Good-by," and then she called out something in her own wild language, and turning, went back among her people.



CHAPTER XIV

FLORIA GAINS THE CASTLE

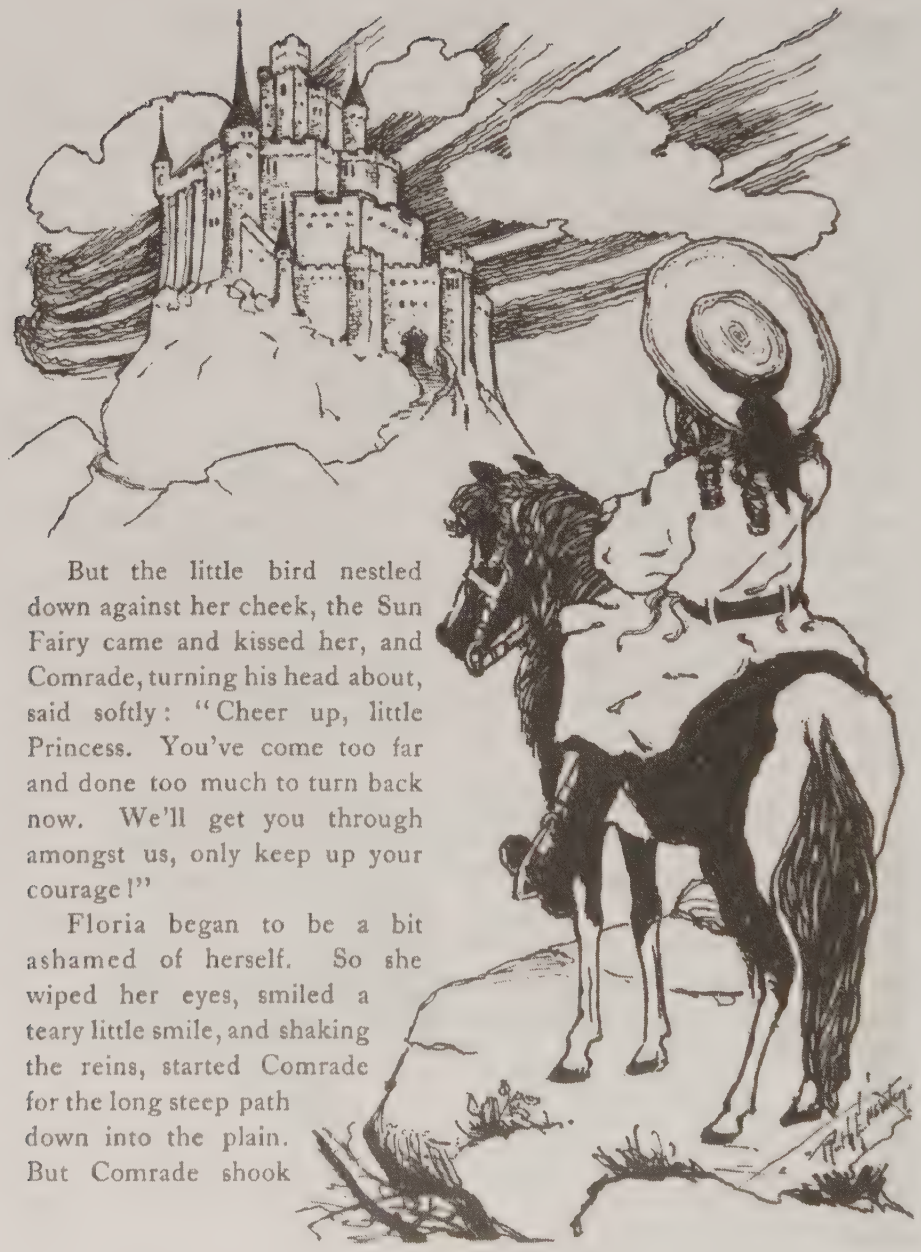
FLORIA, with the bird upon her shoulder, rode forward. For a long ways the ground sloped upward, and then they came to the top of a great cliff, and the Princess Floria, looking over, gave a gasp of wonder. It seemed to her as if all the cities of the world must be spread before her.

There was a great, great plain. In it, as far as Floria could see, were cities, one merging into another; not peaceful, quiet cities, such as that over which her father ruled, but great, bustling, noisy cities, with hurrying crowds of people and stores and factories such as Floria had never seen, and many, many great chimneys, from which came big black clouds of smoke.

Such great clouds that Floria's eyes followed to see where they went. And then of a sudden she understood. These great smoke clouds were the things on which old Giant Grumpy Grouch had built his Castle of Sulks!

Looking up the plain, she could see far away just where the castle must stand; for the smoke all went up there, and she could see a big mass of it, shaped like a pointed mountain, looming black and tall against the sky.

Of a sudden the courage of the poor little Princess all went away. At the sight of that black mountain she began to tremble and to cry, and hid her face in Comrade's neck, and would not be comforted.



But the little bird nestled down against her cheek, the Sun Fairy came and kissed her, and Comrade, turning his head about, said softly: "Cheer up, little Princess. You've come too far and done too much to turn back now. We'll get you through amongst us, only keep up your courage!"

Floria began to be a bit ashamed of herself. So she wiped her eyes, smiled a teary little smile, and shaking the reins, started Comrade for the long steep path down into the plain. But Comrade shook

his head. "No," he said; "we had better not go that way. We'll be among ordinary people again directly, and you know how they'll treat us. We'd better keep along the top of the cliff. See, the Sun Fairy thinks so too," and looking up, Floria saw a broad ray of sunlight, like a great finger, pointing along the narrow path at the top of the cliff. So Floria nodded, and Comrade began trotting steadily on.

The Princess Floria could look down into the plain, and did. At first it made her very dizzy, it was so far down; but she liked to see the things that went on there—they were so strange. And before long, the Princess Floria made up her mind that ordinary people might not believe in her kind of fairies, but they certainly had fairies of their own; for she saw the most wonderful things—carriages without horses, big black things which rushed along sending out great clouds of smoke, and dragged other long narrow things, full of windows, behind them.

Strange boats upon the rivers, strange noises from the streets, and as the dark came on, strange and very wonderful lights within the houses, and shining from tall poles outside.

"I don't wonder," thought the little Princess, "I don't wonder that old Giant Grumpy Grouch has his castle here. I don't wonder at all. I should think that those people down there would lose tempers right along all the time; but when they do, I'd like to know how they go about getting them back again."

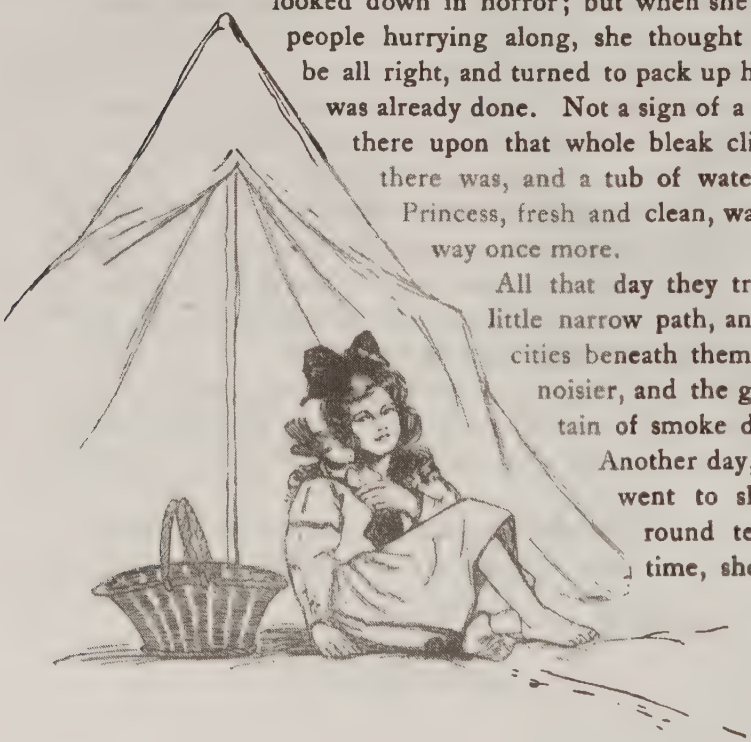
At dusk Comrade stopped, and turning his head, said: "Princess, we'd better camp here for the night. There's no house anywhere about, but we know what the magic basket can do. Let's open it."

Slipping down, Floria threw back the cover, and there, strange to relate, was what looked like a great roll of canvas. She pulled,

and out it came—lots of it—more than it seemed the basket could hold. And in a jiffy, there was a round little tent, with a white cot inside, all spread with soft blankets and clean, fresh sheets, while still in the bottom of the basket, where you would certainly have thought it in danger of being crushed, was a dainty little supper on a tray, and under the tray there was a great pan of oats.

The little bird pecked at Floria's rolls, ate a stalk of celery, gossiped with Comrade, and then, as Floria lay down, flew to her shoulder and sang her to sleep.

But the little Princess was up bright and early. A dreadful shrieking had come from the valley. Every big black building there—the buildings with the chimneys—seemed to be alive and shrieking with pain. Floria clapped her hands to her ears, and looked down in horror; but when she saw long lines of people hurrying along, she thought everything must be all right, and turned to pack up her tent; but that was already done. Not a sign of a bed or a tent was there upon that whole bleak cliff; but breakfast there was, and a tub of water, and the little Princess, fresh and clean, was soon upon her way once more.



All that day they traveled along the little narrow path, and every hour the cities beneath them grew bigger and noisier, and the great black mountain of smoke drew nearer.

Another day, and when Floria went to sleep in the little round tent for the third time, she felt that in the

morning, when she woke, she would be able to see the Castle of Sulks itself, so near had they come to the mountain side.

And sure enough, she could.

There were no cities down below now—only a big, lonely plain, without any trees or grass or flowers—just cinders and dust from the smoke clouds hurrying over it; for the smoke from the cities below rushed up here, and more from the cities above, and the two great columns had swirled together and twisted about till they made a big black pile, which hung low over the plain, never touching the ground, but swinging there, dense and black and grim, while upon its tallest peak there stood a castle.

A great castle, but far from beautiful.

It was of somber black, with thick walls, and strong, square towers, and small windows, guarded, every one, with bars, and there was not a single bright or pretty thing about it—just soot and dirt and grimy piles of ashes. From behind the heavy barred windows came the sound of many voices, wailing.

"It's all the tempers crying to be free," said Comrade. Floria trembled and shrank closer to him.

"Never fear," said the voice of the Sun Fairy. "The hour of greatest trial has come; you can enter, if you will, but you must go alone. No sunbeam can enter there till a way is opened for it; for beneath the sunshine's touch those walls would crumble, the clouds would vanish, and the castle and the mountain fade away. Old Grumpy Grouch knows this and has guarded well against us. There is but one door where we could enter. Look, Floria; it is there, in the top of the tallest tower. Day after day, night after night, the old Giant works to make the clouds so dense, the mountain so dark and strong, that that tiny door too will be quite closed; but he cannot. It has always been up where the

sunlight could reach, and it always will be, else the poor tempers would be lost forever. But, as he cannot make the door less dangerous, he guards it well; for once thrown open, we sunbeams would rush in, and the castle would not be gloomy and black any more. It would grow bright, like sunset clouds, and fade quite away, and the old Giant would be forced to go and build a new one, and gather another set of tempers before he would have a home again. So he has two men to guard it, one by night and one by day, and those two are the enchanted kings from the Free Forest—Prince Snatch and Prince Grab. They would open the door if they dared; but even if they did, it would do no good. They have been so selfish and so bad all their lives that the sunbeams would shrink from them and would not go in. The door must be opened by a good, loving, unselfish person, who wants to help, not herself alone, but others, and you, Floria, after all your travels and your trials, can do it. Remember, not till your temper comes back may you speak. I must go. I can help you no more; but when you reach the little door I will be there to help my sisters in. Good-by!"

The Sun Fairy vanished, and as she went, it seemed to Floria that the clouds about the mountain seemed to float out and reach around her, and everything grew dark and still frightful.

But she set her lips tight so they would not tremble, and winked the tears from her eyes and clambered bravely along the cliff to try and find some place where the clouds lay thick enough for her to cross upon them. But nowhere were they anything but thin, dark vapor. How was she to reach the castle at all?

But suddenly she felt a flutter against her cheek, and looking, there was the little bird. "Now is my time," he chirped. "Now I can help. Look in your basket."

Throwing back the cover, Floria saw what seemed to be a pile of string. "How can that help?" she thought. But the bird seemed to know. With a quick little twitch of his bill, he took up the end of the string, and spreading his wings, flew out across the plain, through the wreaths of vapor, to the solid swinging piles of clouds; and as he went, the string behind him unrolled more and more, growing stronger, bigger as it went, till at last there stretched across the chasm a great round rope, tight and true and safe as safe could be.

But still the Princess wavered. It was so far down—so very far! The rope was, after all, so small!

She set one foot upon it, shrank back, and then, with a great wave of resolution, looked straight ahead, clenched her small hands tight, stepped out, and suddenly the rope seemed to flatten and to grow. Beneath her brave little feet it grew into a path, and she ran swiftly over and stood at last in the courtyard of the Castle of Grumpy Grouch!

CHAPTER XV

THE PRINCESS WINS

ONCE there, Floria stopped, panting. The great place had seemed deserted a moment before; but now from behind every little cloud of smoke, from the walls of the castle, from the very path itself, there sprang up a great crowd of sooty little imps, who caught at her skirts and pinched her toes and pulled her long hair, and cried out the most unkind things they could possibly think of, calling her all sorts of horrid names, and telling of naughty things she had not done and never expected to do, mixed up with bad things she remembered all too well, and was very sorry for.

They exasperated Floria so, and made her so hurt and so angry and so frightened, that she stood still, meaning to fight it out, and tell them exactly what she thought about the things they said, when suddenly she remembered—it was another test. Even now, if she spoke, all her journey would be for just nothing at all. She could help nobody else and would very likely never get her own temper back any more.

In all her journey she had not had so hard a time to hold her tongue. But she just stuck it tight between her teeth and held on, and then ran as fast as ever she could, fighting against the crowd of little grinning, impish things, flinging off their clinging hands, till at last she dashed up the high, hard steps of the castle itself, caught the knocker and raised it. It fell with a crash like

thunder. There was silence for a moment, and then from within the wailings turned to cries for help, and outside the little imps set up a howl much louder than that of the poor imprisoned tempers had ever been.

There was a rumbling within, the great door swung open, and there before her stood old Giant Grumpy Grouch himself. Such a queer, horrid old man—hair and beard and bushy eyebrows that would have been white had they not been grimed with the soot from his mountain of smoke; long, strong arms that dropped to his knees, big, claw-like hands, broad, bent shoulders and a great heavy head that rolled

back and forth, while the cruel little eyes looked here and there for the bold person who had dared invadè his castle.

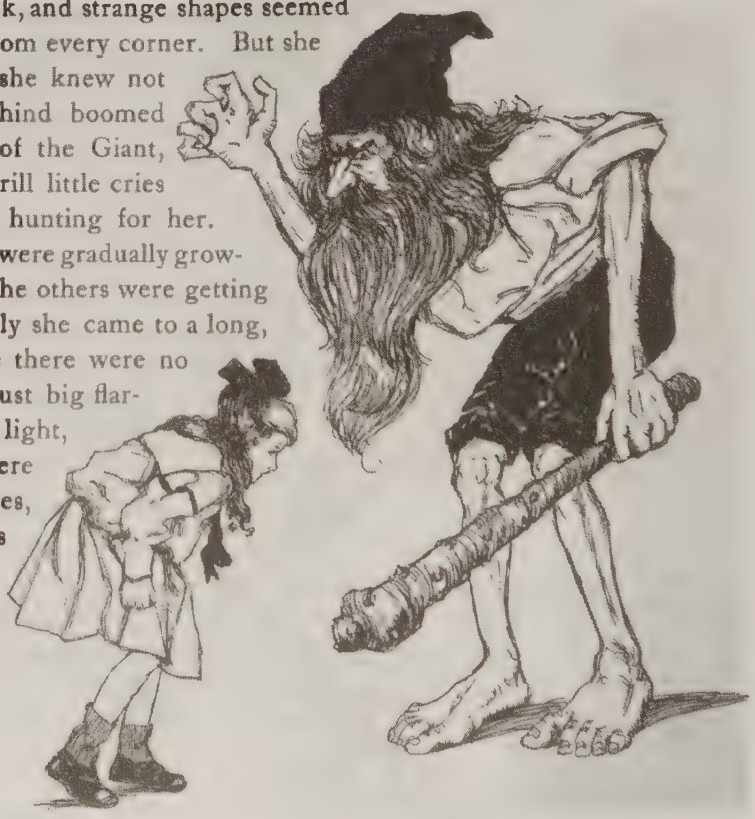
Floria was so small that at first he looked right over her.

And it was in that second that she made her plan. If he saw her and caught her, what good could she ever do? How could a little girl escape from a great, strong giant like that?

She must get in without his seeing her, and find her way alone to the tallest tower, and reach that one little door and get it open, all before he caught her. Quick as a flash, she ran in under his arm.

It was very dark inside the castle. Walls and floors and ceilings all were black, and strange shapes seemed to loom at her from every corner. But she ran bravely on, she knew not where, while behind boomed the great voice of the Giant, and the high, shrill little cries of the imps, all hunting for her.

These sounds were gradually growing fainter, but the others were getting near, and suddenly she came to a long, high hall, where there were no windows at all, just big flaring torches for light, and the walls were covered with cages, and from the bars came the wailing of the lost tempers.



There were hundreds of them—hundreds and hundreds; and though she found it hard to see them, they could all see her, and they cried to her pitifully and begged her to stop and let them out. But Floria ran on. She knew that she could never break one single one of all those heavy bars herself. If she even stopped to try, she would be caught. The only hope lay in that far-away little door, where the long, bright ranks of sunbeams waited. But it was harder than ever to go past without speaking. They called to her so longingly, begging for just one word of comfort—the very word that Floria could not give, if she was to get them out at all.

The poor little girl finally put her hands tight over her ears and ran faster than ever, for the cries of the tempers had shown Giant Grumpy Grouch and all his little teasing imps that she must be inside and they were coming—she could hear them hurrying through the halls.

Suddenly, as she ran, she stumbled over something, fell, and as she picked herself up, gave a great sigh of despair; for it was a man, and she felt that she was lost. But, though he grasped her tightly and shook her just at first, all at once he gave a great cry.

"You've come to help us," he cried—"quick, follow me;" and grasping her hand, he led her down one long, dark hallway after another, till at last they reached a low little door, half hidden in an angle of the wall.

He opened the door and thrust Floria through.

"There," he cried, "there is the stairway that leads to the door—the one door through which help may reach us. My brother, Prince Grab, is guarding it, and guard it he must with his life; for old Giant Grumpy Grouch holds us in a spell, and if either fails while on guard he is doomed to follow the Giant always.

There is but one thing that you can do—don't let him know you wish to reach the door at all. Make friends; then, when he is not watching, run quick, throw it open and all will be safe. The power of the Giant over everything within these walls is gone as soon as the sunshine brings brightness and peace inside. Go."

He slammed the little door behind him, and Floria toiled up and up the stairs.

They were as steep as a ladder, narrow, dark and dirty. Great spiders swung close beside her. A mouse scurried under her skirts, and strange, unknown noises seemed to be above and below. There were no landings. Up and up and up she went, till, as the stairs wound round and round the tower, the Princess Floria grew faint and dizzy.

Then, just as her strength was failing, she came to the top. A round little room, lighter

than any other she had seen within the castle—windows, and at one side a door, very small, and nearly covered with bolts and locks and chains. Before it was sitting a man. He wore armor, a great sword lay across his knees, a tall pike stood beside him, and he held a dagger in his hand.

If Flŏria had looked closely, she would have seen how sad and drawn his face was; but she only saw the pike and the dagger and the sword, and was so frightened at the thought of fighting a man with all these weapons, that she just sank down on the floor and began to sob as if her heart would break. It was the best thing she could have done. Who would imagine that any danger was coming from a little crying girl? Certainly not Prince Grab, who even in his worst days had been kind-hearted when he had the time. Now, with hours and hours to think of how selfish and mean he had been, he was only too glad to do what he could for other people, and running to Floria, he took her up and tried to comfort her,

finally forgetting all about the door and setting her in his own great chair before it.

But suddenly, from far down the stairway, came the sound of heavy feet and angry voices. Floria knew what it meant. Old Grumpy Grouch was after her at last. She cried and trembled, but Prince Grab caught up the sword, stuck the dagger in his belt, and grasping the pike, set it with its sharp-pointed end far down the little passage.

"Don't be afraid," he called back. "Someone is coming to try my door. I must defend it, but don't be frightened. They shall not hurt you." And he went valiantly away to fight his own master, leaving the real enemy there behind him.

It seemed so funny that the Princess Floria gave a little laugh as she slipped from the chair and ran around to the door. She must work fast. In a minute the Giant would be there, Prince Grab would find out his mistake, and they would all come to stop her.

One bolt, two, three, shot back beneath her eager fingers. A great chain rattled down. The big bar swung aside. They were coming now—she could hear them—and yet the door held fast. Where, oh where was the key? She looked wildly around and saw it hanging far above her head. With a little cry she sprang up on the great chair, climbed so she stood upon the arm, grasped the key, jumped down, fitted it to the lock, turned with all her might, and, just as Giant Grumpy Grouch rushed into the little room, his great hands spread to catch her, the door started, creaked loudly on its rusty hinges, and, as the Giant's fingers touched the Princess' dress, swung slowly open.

Behind her Floria heard a great cry, but she did not turn; for in front were masses of golden sunshine. It seemed to Floria

that in the long, straight beams of light, she could see figures, gleaming armor, sword-points—that the whole was a great, beautiful army drawn up against the Castle of Sulks and its grim old guardian.

She almost thought she could hear the hum of happy voices as the sunlight came streaming past her.

But, however that might be, when at last she did turn, wonder of wonders, she was not in the little tower room any longer! She stood once more on the bank, where she and Comrade and the little brown bird had been that morning. Across the chasm she could still see the castle, but oh, so changed!

The sunlight had lit the great place into glory. Walls and towers and courtyard, even the mountain of smoke itself, were bright with color. The whole mass was, as the Sun Fairy had said it would be, shining like the sunset clouds, and yet it was sinking, changing. Now a tower went down; now a great grim wall floated off in the form of a tiny crimson cloud. Through it all flew hundreds of gauzy golden shapes, and suddenly as she looked, the Princess, for the first time in all her travels, saw the Sun Fairy distinctly. She stood out as clear and bright as the long beam of sunshine behind her.

Her golden hair fell softly about her figure; her pale gold robes fluttered slightly, as though a breeze was passing; her calm, sweet face shone with light, and she held out one hand towards Floria, touching her upon the breast.

"Your task is done," she said. "The Castle of Sulks is vanquished, old Grumpy Grouch will rule here no more. Against bravery, hope, sunshine and happiness he has no power. You have won your temper back, and have the power to help many others. You will never see me any more. Good-by."

Suddenly there was a great burst of sunshine and in it the figure of the Sun Fairy was quite lost.

Dazzled, Floria rubbed her eyes, and when she looked again the Castle of Grumpy Grouch had vanished entirely, and far, far off she could see a strange little black cloud hurrying away.

"Old Giant Grumpy Grouch on his way to build another castle. He always has one somewhere—worse luck," said a voice beside her.

Floria turned with a little cry. A tall young man was standing there; a strange young man she was certain, and yet with friendly brown eyes she seemed to know.

"Come, Princess," he said gaily. "The deed is done. Your task is finished. Why stay here any longer?"

Floria, used to motions, started to shake her head, when suddenly she remembered she could speak. With a glad little cry she exclaimed: "Oh, I can talk, I can talk again! But I cannot go. There are others I must help. And how did you know I was a princess?" He laughed and pointed.

Floria looked, and then gave an exclamation of astonishment —almost fear.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW IT ALL TURNED OUT

NO wonder the Princess Floria was astonished! She wore her own clothes again. There was the white gown, with the royal arms of her country embroidered in gold upon it. There were the long, ermine-trimmed sleeves, and upon her head she felt the little golden crown. But something still seemed strange to her.

"What is it?" she asked helplessly. "There is something different about me. And then, who are you?"

"You have grown up," said the young man. "Don't you understand? It wasn't weeks that you wandered with Loris or stayed in the Free Forest, saw the little king, visited ordinary people, or traveled with the Gypsies; it was years. As for me, I'm a friend."

"Ah," cried the little Princess. "But I've so many friends who have all been good to me. Where is Comrade, and what has become of the little brown bird? I want to thank them. Then they told me I could help the people in the Free Forest, and get old Brother Bruin out of his cage, and there's the little lost prince—I must hurry and find his temper."

"You have helped them already," said the young man. "Princess, don't you know me?"

Floria looked at him long and steadily. The voice—the eyes—suddenly she gave a little joyful cry. "Comrade," she exclaimed; "why, you must be Comrade."

The young man laughed and nodded. "I am," he said gaily.

"But how—why—tell me more," cried the Princess.

"Not now," said Comrade gently. "There is someone else who wants to tell you, and, besides, here is something for you to do. Look," and he pointed at two figures, sitting by the side of the path, gloomy and forlorn.

"Who are they?" whispered Floria. "Go and ask," said Comrade; and going towards them, Floria said gently, "Who are you, and what is the matter?"

One of the men sighed deeply, and the other gave a hard, unhappy little laugh, as he answered, "We have been servants to Giant Grumpy Grouch, in the great castle you have destroyed, but we were not that willingly, nor have we been so always. Once we had each a kingdom and everything that could be asked for. But we weren't happy, because we didn't know how. We weren't satisfied with anything we had, and we snatched and grabbed from other people, until—"

"Oh, I know—I know you now," cried Floria excitedly. "You helped me to the door. But surely you are free? Old Grumpy Grouch hasn't any spell over you still, has he?"

"No," said Prince Snatch sadly; "he hasn't. But it's too late now. We've lost our kingdoms and our people and our homes."

"But what if it's not too late?" persisted Floria. "What would you do if you had your kingdoms back?"

"Do?" they cried, jumping up together and the one who had not spoken before went on. "We'd govern as kings never governed before. But the people will not have us back. They were tired of us. They said so. And the fairies did something to them, too, so they would have no cares or worries any more. Oh, they wouldn't have us back."

"Yes, they would," said the Princess decidedly. "You don't know. I do. I've seen them. They were turned into trees and stones and things, and though they haven't any cares, they're dreadfully tired of life as it is now. They see it's best to be busy, as you see it's best to be satisfied, and they're just longing for you to come back, so they can be changed to people again. Go—go—go!" The little Princess gave them a shove with her hand, and instantly their clothes changed as her own had done. Their rags became kingly robes, and then suddenly they were caught up and whisked through the air on their way to their countries.

"Now then," said Floria, turning to Comrade, "they're off my hands, and the folks in the enchanted forest are set free, thank goodness. I should think they would be tired of being just things; but I suppose they had to be taught as I did. But, Comrade, I ought to hurry. I've so much to do, and then I must get home. If it's so many years since I left, my father and my mother must be getting very old. I must go to them. They will have missed me so."

"All in good time, all in good time," laughed Comrade. "You must go on your journey the way you came. Think how much you have to do along the way."

The tears started to Floria's eyes. "Yes," she said, "there is so much to do. But I will be an old woman when I do get home, if I go back as I came."

"Not a bit of it," cried Comrade. "Trust me. You know you were put into my charge, and the fairies have not forsaken us, though you are not likely to see them any more. Look. See what the magic basket has done for you this time."

The Princess Floria looked, and there, as certain as could be, was the magic basket. But such a changed basket, for it had

grown out of all size! It was as big as a carriage, and inside were seats, all covered with red velvet; and as Comrade helped her in, the basket suddenly rose, with a graceful motion, and set off through the air, with Floria and her companion inside.

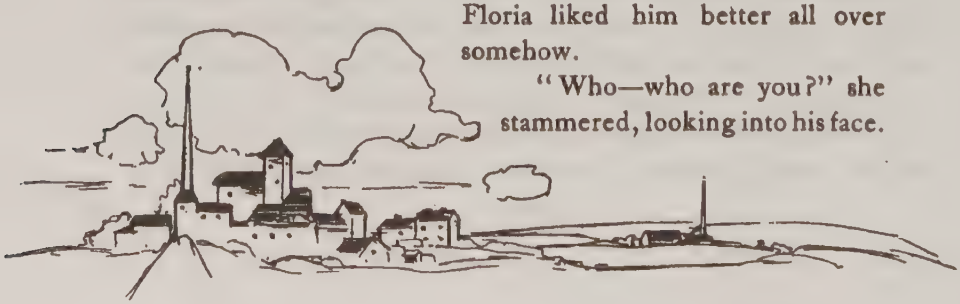
"Where are we going? I must know!" cried the Princess, peering down over the sides of the basket at the great, noisy black cities, hurrying by beneath them. "Oh, how dirty and how noisy they are! I'm so glad I'll never have to live in one. I like my father's city best. Tell me, Comrade, am I going home?"

"Yes," came the answer. "You are going home."

But somehow it did not sound like Comrade's voice, and the Princess Floria, jumping nearly out of the basket, turned to look. Sure enough, Comrade had vanished again, and here was another man beside her.

But for the life of her, and good as Comrade had been, the Princess could not feel sorry. This man had eyes as kind, as pleasant, and oh, much, much handsomer. And he was—well, Floria liked him better all over somehow.

"Who—who are you?" she stammered, looking into his face.



As Comrade had done, he said: "Don't you know me, Princess?" And, as she had done with Comrade, Floria, looking straight up into his eyes, knew all at once.

"Why," she cried with a gasp of joy—"why, you're Loris!" The young man nodded. "Yes," he said, "I'm Loris. I'm somebody else, too. Can't you guess who?"

Floria looked and thought, and suddenly she clapped her hands and flushed with pleasure. "Why," she cried, "why, mercy me, I do believe you are the little lost prince!"

"I am, I am," cried the young man gaily. "I'm the lost prince—Prince Loris."

"Oh, oh, oh," sighed Floria. "Tell me all about it," and she settled herself comfortably in the corner of the basket and listened while Prince Loris told her the story of how and why he had lost his temper, his wanderings, his adventures, and what made him speak, so that he lost all chance of winning back his temper himself, and had to wait for her to help him.

"It was somebody you know who made me," he explained. "It was the king who took you for a wild girl. He's a son of my old nurse and he knew all about me, and he met me and made fun of me, and said that he would go and take my throne and my country when he grew up, and pretend he was the lost prince, and marry the Princess Vanita, who was to have married me, and I was so angry I spoke. And then, suddenly, there I was—a prince no longer, but a fox, with only my faithful playmate, Comrade, willing to share my punishment.

"Grandfather Fox took me in and everybody was kind. But all these years I've wandered, wandered, wondering what would become of my kingdom. Because, you see, Bobo, my nurse's son, did as he said. When he was grown he went and claimed

my kingdom in my name. But some people suspected him, the Princess Vanita most of all, and that was what she meant when she spoke of being born royal, and when she said he was haunted. He was. I made him dream of me and whispered strange things to him when he went into the woods, and he was afraid."

"But the Princess Vanita? If she suspected, why didn't she try to find you?" asked Floria. Somehow she did not like this tale of the Princess Vanita—she did not like it a bit. "I—I suppose now you'll go back and marry her after all."

"No, I will not," said the prince decidedly. "She didn't care who was king as long as she had a chance to be queen. She grew up to fit her name, as vain as could be, and I've no use for her at all. She may have Bobo and welcome; but they cannot have my kingdom. They're spoiling my people. I must hurry back and help them. And Floria, when you have seen your father and mother and home, won't you come and help me? Won't you be queen in place of the Princess Vanita?"

Floria stared. She couldn't remember she was grown up and old enough to get married if she pleased. Then looking down, she saw the long train that lay about her feet and remembered. Who was it that had told her that for every princess there was, of course, a prince? But before she could say a word the basket settled suddenly down, and there they were right among the band of Gypsies!

It was evening and everybody was there. Zelma came running out, and the Queen, and old Anita, and on Anita's shoulder sat a small brown bird, who came and twittered in Floria's ear.

"Your hope and trust and courage made him strong to help you," piped old Anita. "Your fortune, Princess—let old Anita tell your fortune. I told it right before." And taking Floria's

hand, she nodded and whispered to herself, and then cried: "Happiness—happiness for ever after—happiness and your prince!" and, laughing at Floria, who blushed very red, she took her little bird and went away, while Floria began to talk, telling the Gypsies all she could not tell before. They spent the night there, and then went on.

But when they came to the house of the ordinary people, the basket changed to an automobile, and their robes of state to big, baggy coats, and their crowns to caps.

"For," said Prince Loris, "it's no use trying to get them to believe in things they haven't brains to understand, you know."

But they told enough, and Floria said "thanks" over and over again, and then they went on, and on, and on, right into the heart of Prince Loris' own kingdom. Their royal robes came back, and their automobile changed this time into a coach with twelve white horses, and they drove through the streets to the castle, where everybody knew their Prince at once, and raised such a shout that Bobo, who was taking exercises to make him strong, ran out with a dumb-bell in each hand and an Indian club tied to each foot. But seeing them, he threw down the bells and began to cry, like a great baby as he was, so that the Princess Vanita, hurrying out with her dumb-bells, which she was using to make herself thin, fell over him, and the two, dumb-bells and Indian clubs and all, went rolling over and over and over down the palace stairs, landing in a heap before the steps of the coach, so that everybody roared with laughter at the sight. But though very red, the two tumbled up to their knees.

"Oh, please, Prince Loris," cried poor frightened Bobo, "I didn't mean any harm; honest I didn't. I was just keeping your kingdom and your princess safe while you were away."

"And oh, Loris, dear, I didn't mean to marry him," cried Vanita. "I was just keeping an eye on him so he wouldn't spoil everything before you got back."

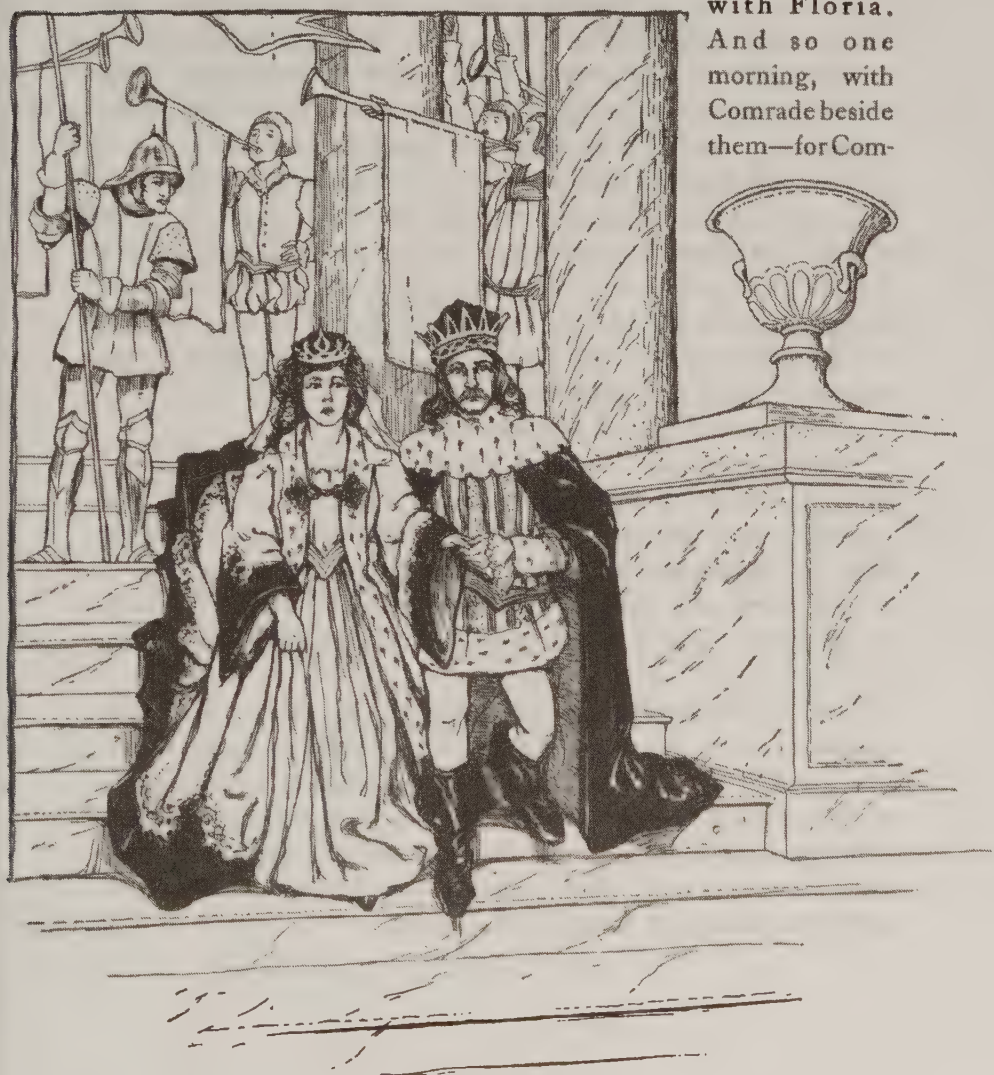
"Get up," said Prince Loris. "Get up, both of you, and don't be silly. Nothing shall happen to you. You'll just have to marry each other, exactly as you'd planned, and go on trying to get fat and thin all your lives long. That's enough for you. Stand back, please." "Oh dear, oh dear—I don't want to marry that horrid, skinny little man—I want to be the q-u-eeee-n!" wailed Vanita.

And "Oh, I won't marry that fat, coarse, vain creature, if I'm not to be a king," cried Bobo. "I don't need a royal wife any more. Please don't make me." But Prince Loris waved his hand, and the court soldiers came and hustled the two right away to the church, and they were married before the little Bobo could even get the Indian clubs untied from his legs; after which the court treasurer gave them some money and a railroad pass, and the last ever known of them they were living in the dirtiest and noisiest of the cities Floria had seen, still exercising to grow fat and thin, and trying to get other people to do it too. So there was an end of that couple.

But there was someone else in the city who fared very differently. As soon as they could, Loris and Floria had the coachman whip up their horses and they drove straight to the menagerie.

Sure enough, there was Brother Bruin, curled up asleep in the sun. But they soon woke him, and a happier bear nobody ever laid eyes upon. They let him out and gave him a ton of honey, two pounds of loaf sugar and a box of sweet wafers, and he went home feeling that maybe it hadn't been so bad to be kept there after all; for Prince Loris had promised he should never be

hunted any more; and the Princess had given him a kiss! All through the city there were rejoicings; but Prince Loris, after setting things going in the right way, felt that he must hurry on with Floria. And so one morning, with Comrade beside them—for Com-



rade had got back before them and been the first to meet them at the castle—they drove off again on their way to Floria's home.

They saw Grandfather Fox, and did all they could for him. They went where the Free Forest had been, and found instead two big, bright, busy cities filled with good and happy people, and ruled over by wise and gentle kings, who both took counsel and help from a rough, gruff, kind-hearted old chancellor—Brother Rock, to be sure! And glad he was to see them.

But they went on, after the shortest of visits, and found the Boy, who had been kind to Floria and given her that wonderful basket. They took him with them, visited the witch, paid her for Floria's little gold crown and dress, which she had missed from her strong room in the most unaccountable way not long before, and then warning her to be kind to people or they would take her money away too, they went on.

So at last the Princess Floria came home.

What a joyful day it was! The country, which had been practically in mourning all these years, grew bright and gay. The people shouted and sang. Her father and mother came running down the palace steps to meet her, their royal robes trailing out behind them and tripping up pages and courtiers who were running too. There was happiness and thanksgiving all over the country.

And on the second day after she got home, giving the court dressmakers just time to get a wonderful wedding gown made, Floria and Prince Loris were married. And as they could not rule two kingdoms at once, why, what do you think happened? Floria's father gave his kingdom to the Boy, who married Zelma, and they ruled wisely and well. But Comrade stayed always beside Loris, as he had through all the years of waiting.

HOW IT ALL TURNED OUT

The old temper Professor? Oh, he was so glad to see the Princess safe home that he cried. And then he made her tell him everything that had happened, and he wrote it all down in a book, so he could show it to his other pupils and teach them better.

But though old Giant Grumpy Grouch built himself another Castle of Sulks, as big as ever the first one was, and caught many, many tempers in it, he got them all from the great black cities.

In the other countries people were very careful.

They had been warned in time by the adventures of a little Princess.

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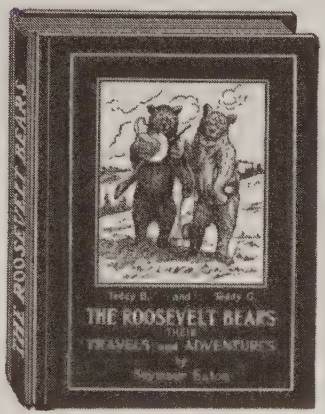

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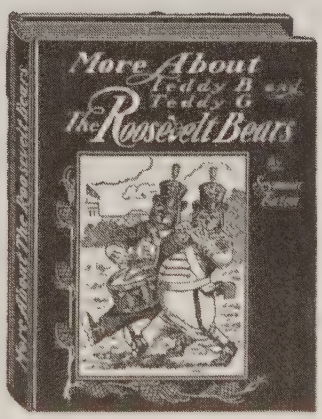

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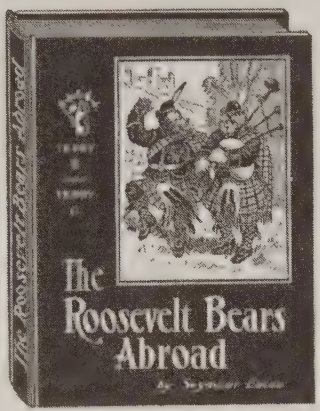

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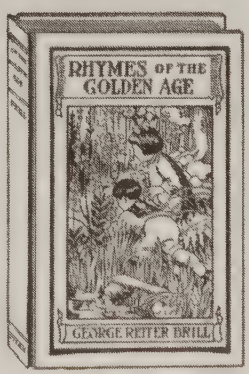

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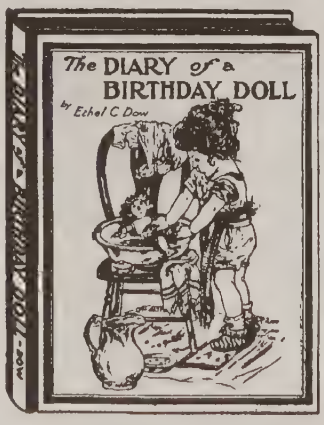

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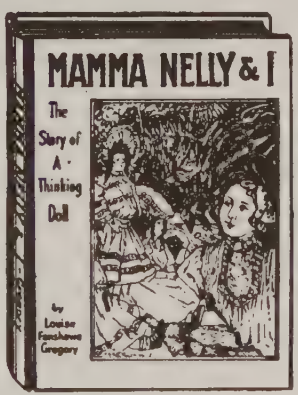
The Story of a Thinking Doll

Told by Chrissy Herself

BY

LOUISE F. GREGORY



This is a story of the adventures of a doll who came from far-off England to America, and whose experiences were many and varied.

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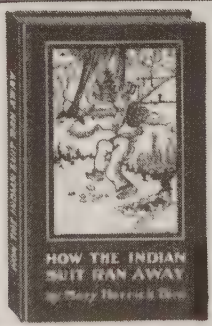

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